

A CHRISTIAN
PHENOMENOLOGICAL
CULTURE

A “New to You” Matrix

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TO THE HESITANT PHILOSOPHER *

If philosophy's myths to philosophy's truth,
Pros and cons with right and wrong,
Traditionalism, existentialism and hidden wonder,
If wisdom, Gnosticism and things unknown;
In all their human thought retold,
But not exactly in the ancient way,
Can please, as in my day,
The wiser youngsters of to-day:
So be it, and read on!

If not; If studious youth no longer craves,
That ancient light recast,
Plato, Aristotle and Thomas of Aquino,
Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger.

So be it. And may we,
In all our ignorance share the grave,
Where these and all their ancient musings lie!

(* With a tip o' the hat to Robert Louis Stevenson)

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PART ONE

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL MEANING OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE

Introduction

I begin this brief essay on the assigned phenomenological meaning of Western Christian culture, not merely on the presumption that such a culture actually exists, but on my experience of and participation in that culture.¹ In other words, I philosophize about Christian culture as an insider, a participant-observer, not merely as an external-independent critic. To my mind, there are a sufficient number of Christians in the world who demonstrate their beliefs within differing cultures that populate the globe which are sociologically observable to justify viewing Christian culture as a phenomenological matrix in which the Church politically and theologically evolves.² Gregory

¹ Western Christian culture is not to be equated with organized religion, that is, the Church. Christian culture is the matrix “of the external relation of the Church and its development as an organization first unrecognized, then persecuted by the state, then tolerated and later patronized within the state, until it becomes the partner of Empire, able in some relations to assert its mastery over the secular power.” *Documents of the Christian Church* (1963:vi) Oxford University Press (ed. Henry Bettenson).

² Alexander Jones, the Editor of the *The Jerusalem Bible* (Doubleday, 1966) provides an excellent understanding in his Foreword of what I understand to be the significance of Christian culture today. From the perspective of Scriptural Studies, he writes: “The form and nature of this edition of Bible have been determined by two of the principal dangers facing the Christian religion today. The first is the reduction of Christianity to the status of a relic — affectionately regarded, it is true, but considered irrelevant to our times. The second is its rejection of its mythology, born and cherished in emotion with nothing at all to say to

Baum suggests that the undisclosed operative element in societal patterns that, once revealed, can be analyzed from a philosophical perspective. “Societies [Christian cultures] are vulnerable to a kind of behaviour that is not so much determined by conscious choices than by hidden forces in the institution.”³ In short, there is a relationship between the institution (the Church) and its formative matrix (its culture). In these essays I hope to expose, from a phenomenological perspective, some of those hidden institutional forces as they apply to Christian culture. My ideas originate in the experience of the West but are not confined to the experience of the West, nor on the whole are they that original. As a case in point, in 1993 at the Institute of Philosophy and Culture, University of Madras, India, a seminar on the theme of wisdom and culture was undertaken involving various participants.⁴ From the point of view of philosophy, then, as I inquire into this question, I am conscious of the phenomenological meeting point of

the mind. ... Now for Christian thinking in the twentieth century two slogans have been widely adopted: *aggiornamento*, or keeping abreast of the times, and *approfondimento*, or deepening of theological thought.” One principle evident throughout this book is that a deepening of *theological* thought can only occur if there is a preceding deepening of *philosophical* thought.

³ *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (Herder and Herder, 1968:63).

⁴ Anand Amaladass noted at that seminar that the “*wisdom tradition* even as it transcends its culture, remains immersed within its cultural setting and presuppositions and in that sense it is not universally available for the assent of the rational mind. So the *wisdom* is always culturally rooted. There has been also a search for wisdom across the cultures. Every culture is confronted with questions and challenges from outside. And thinkers of the past in a particular culture do not offer solutions to such problems. Hence there is today more than even a re-search for wisdom or doing philosophy at the meeting point of cultures.” [Author’s italics] Editor’s Introduction to *The Role of the Philosopher Today*, Satya Nilayam Publications, Madras (1994:xviii).

cultures. The overriding question I consider here is: can contemporary Christian culture continue to evolve on the assumption that the faithful assign to it particular religious and philosophical values, but not necessarily universal cultural values? Or, can Christian culture continue without being universal?

Obviously, in this short book, only an introductory and partial answer can be given to such a broad question that distinguishes between religious (philosophical) and secular (political) values. In appreciating this question, a general knowledge of the contemporary interpretation of history and a current understanding of the process of evolution will be of great benefit to the reader. Since I do not detail the historical origins of the principles of Western philosophy, nor outline any specifics in the development of the concept of evolution since it was introduced by Charles Darwin in his *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859. Such background is presumed on my part.

Further, the ideas I consider here are not original. They derive, by and large, from a new interpretation of consciousness and are an extension of the notions presented by Leslie Dewart in *The Foundations of Belief*. In exploring the legacy of Hellenic philosophy, he wrote "that philosophy today must give itself a meta-metaphysical orientation. I have suggested that philosophy should transcend its metaphysical stage of development and, thus, initiate its meta-metaphysical age."⁵ To my way of thinking phenomenological philosophers have initiated the *transcendent* stage of Dewart's meta-metaphysical age since they philosophize by "bracketing out" the legacy of the scholastic perspective on the Hellenic *transcendental*

⁵ *Foundations of Belief*, Herder and Herder (1969:19).

understanding of being. More is said about the distinction between *transcendent* and *transcendental* below.

Dewart’s meta-metaphysical age may be viewed as arising from within the age of the *global village* which requires that humanity organize itself in a more highly integrated manner while recognizing the many varied and diverse cultures within its evolution. The term global village is associated with Marshall McLuhan, whose aphorism “the medium is the message,” was originally a term for the influence of electronic information in all its forms on human culture.⁶ The term continues to be significant for phenomenological philosophers in that it identifies the “village concept” as establishing information parameters for all cultures on the globe. Phenomenologically, for the moment at least, the global village cannot be extended beyond the cosmos. It can only be experienced within local (human) parameters on this earth, and can only disclose information on cultures in this world. In the distant future this will possibly change as humans colonize galaxies beyond their own. In the global village, cultures evolve through the integrated experiences of disparate populations thus heightening or deepening the consciousness of a particular aboriginal experience. These new perspectives of consciousness translate into a *new to you* cultural experience. In light of the growing number of Christian cultures it is important that such new experiences of consciousness are interpreted by philosophers through an appropriate philosophy, not an inadequate one.

⁶ Marshall McLuhan (1911 – 1980) was a communication theorist and a Canadian Professor of English at the University of Toronto. McLuhan became internationally known in the 1960s for his studies on the effects of the mass media on the thought and behaviour of human beings.

From the perspective of modern history and contemporary evolution, I suggest that the classical idea of *union* is being replaced by the phenomenological notion of *unity*. The idea of union originates within Western classical ontology, whereas, the notion of unity originates within Western phenomenological ontology. Both Hellenist philosophers and phenomenological philosophers study the theory of being, i.e., ontology, from their particular perspectives of experience. The former philosophers are predominantly objective, (idealistic) whereas, the latter philosophers are mostly subjective (existential). From my observations, little has been seriously done in contemporary Christian culture to replace the concept of union with the concept of unity. As a result, contemporary Western Christian culture remains dominantly Hellenistic in its philosophical foundation. But this is subject to evolutionary change. Karl Rahner writes that there is “no comprehensive history of the philosophical concept of unity, its interpretation or the consequences of its different interpretations and their application to many differing philosophical questions.”⁷

Francis Clooney, discussing the task of philosophy today, makes the following observation regarding the meeting point of culture and philosophy.

The “culture” (“cultures”) of the modern West (from the 17th century to the present time) is especially important insofar as its deliberate critique of—and distancing from—its traditional roots occurred precisely at the time the modern West was becoming globally dominant. The ideas of the modern West, and hence its philosophical wisdom, have contributed very significantly to the way the

⁷ s. v. ‘Unity’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975 (ed. Karl Rahner).

world is today. One may also suggest that the philosophy of the modern West is post-traditional in a way that makes it different not only from its own antecedents but from all other cultures as well; the culture of the modern West has made every other culture “a traditional culture.”⁸

Many present-day theologians and philosophers of Christian culture cling to the understanding that Christian culture is intended to bring about a union of the faithful. They assume that Christian culture is, in fact, a supernatural and revealed phenomenon in contrast to an existentially created matrix brought about through the conscious efforts of the faithful. But the assumed belief of a revealed culture requires the antecedent belief that Christian philosophical and theological truths themselves are revealed by God acting as an external agent. That is to say that God reveals truth and Christian culture without distinction and that if the philosopher and theologian know the one, they know the other. This is the classical concept that I challenge in this book.

The phenomenological meaning of Christian culture, in light of present human needs, must be analysed and empirically (existentially) assigned a value, or significance, since as Leslie Dewart expressed it, “the reshaping of the future is but the other side of the analysis of the past.”⁹ That is to say that phenomenological philosophers argue that Christian humanity needs to re-define itself within

⁸ ‘The Task of Philosophy at the Meeting Points of Cultures’ in *The Role of the Philosopher Today*, Satya Nilayam Publications, Madras (1994:121). I venture to make a slight adaptation of Clooney’s last sentence and make the point that *the culture of modern science* has made every other culture *a traditional culture*, including Christian culture.

⁹ *Foundations of Belief* Herder and Herder (1969:43).

existential relationships and subsequently re-fashion, but not duplicate, the values of the religious culture that it has inherited. In re-defining religious cultural values many phenomenological philosophers prefer to think in terms of a qualitative cultural Catholicity and not in terms of a quantitative political Christendom of the type established at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., and subsequently developed through various historical phases up to the present day.¹⁰

Catholicity is a qualitative notion arising from a phenomenological interpretation of Christian culture that presents an alternative to the quantitative concept of classical Christendom, or Catholicism, which appears today to be in significant philosophical decline. The need for a phenomenological philosophical alternative is not limited to the Christian experience. The philosophers and anthropologists studying the effects of the global village on secular cultures have discerned a need for a qualitative alternative to the particularism of these cultures, that is, some form of understanding of universality, not universalism. As I understand it, what is common among religious and secular ontological cultures is that they all recognize objectively some external and universal aspect of what characterizes humanity. However, the insight that arises within the minds of cultural anthropologists and phenomenologists contemplating the existence of particular

¹⁰ As Odilio Engels notes: "In Constantine's view, the security of the empire and the unity of the Church were inseparably linked. ... The status of the Emperor in the Council made the assembly of bishops of all the Churches into a kind of imperial council, an imperial institution, and accordingly the Council's decisions were given imperial endorsement and its disciplinary measures were supervised by the civil magistrates." s. v. 'Council' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates (1975:299) ed. Karl Rahner.

religious cultures is that the Hellenic philosophical concept of objective reality is not universally valid within phenomenology. It is a given that ontological and phenomenological philosophers contemplate the reality of their experience.¹¹ As a phenomenological philosopher and in light of the evolutionary understanding of contemplation, that is humanity's relation to reality, I hold that Western humanity's philosophical dependence upon the principles of ancient Hellenic epistemology does not need to be retained in the future. This inherited Hellenic dependence can be replaced by phenomenological philosophy.¹²

In this book I do not consider the terms *transcendent* and *transcendental* to be interchangeable, but as adjectives related to each other. Notions that are transcendent are metaphysical and present in the mind, but they belong solely to this world, yet have no substantial content. That is, they have no concrete being in themselves, but are like numbers, colours, and the abstract qualities of truth, justice and honesty, etc. Further, notions that are transcendent require some physical object in which to be recognized. On the other hand, transcendental ideas are also metaphysical and present to the mind, yet they do not belong solely within this world, but are external to it. Humans assume an idealized content to transcendental ideas *as if* they were

¹¹ Concerning philosophical contemplation, Leslie Dewart notes in *Foundations of Belief* (Herder and Herder, 1969:61) that "the most proper human relation to reality is that of contemplation, as Plato and Aristotle repeatedly and extensively remarked."

¹² What distinguishes phenomenology as an alternative philosophy is the personal self-reflection by the thinker on reality. Johnson Puthenpurackal has noted that Martin Heidegger "has brought about a 'revolution' in philosophy by making it a thinker-involved thought, a self-reflection." 'The Challenge to be a Thinker: A Heideggerian Perspective' in *The Role of the Philosopher Today* (1994:45) Satya Nilayam Publications, Madras, India (ed. Anand Amaladass).

real in themselves without needing physical objects, i.e., the reality of spiritual beings not of this world.¹³ Even though felt through human experience, transcendental ideas originate in another world beyond this one, according to classical Christian philosophy. In short, transcendental ideas are *otherworldly*, whereas transcendent notions are *worldly*, and hence the former are communicated to humanity via supernatural revelation. They belong to "the theory of archetypal Ideas, whether in the original Platonic teaching or as incorporated into Christian Platonic and Scholastic theism," as Wilber Long has noted.¹⁴

Transcendent ideas are actually phenomenological notions, arising from within human conscious experience and, are confined to the interpretation of what appears, or is experienced, in this world. Therefore, in this book I stress only those transcendent insights that are observable within Christian cultures through phenomenological philosophy.

It is worth noting at this point that Plato and Aristotle were not, as some uncritical philosophers think, the initiators of the Hellenic philosophical attitude. They were, in fact, the climax of the Hellenic philosophical attitude which has deeply influenced Western Christian culture to date. It is clear from a contemporary historical perspective that the Hellenic philosophical attitude originated with the pre-Socratic thinkers. The Hellenic concept of knowledge, arising within the Platonic and Aristotelian history, once accepted, is very difficult to ignore. This may account for the fact that phenomenological philosophy, presenting an alternative to classical epistemology, enjoys limited acceptance in Western thought. Some contemporary

¹³ The work of Hans Vaihinger (1852-1933) in *The Philosophy of "As If,"* provides a good introduction to this philosophical understanding.

¹⁴ s. v. 'Idealism' in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval, Modern* (D. D. Runes, ed., 1963).

philosophers even go so far as to place classical and phenomenological epistemology in opposition to each other. However, to the contrary from my perspective concerning the meaning of Christian culture, both classical epistemologists and phenomenological epistemologists share the study of being (ontology) as their common goal of inquiry. This cooperative aspect should be evident to anyone studying the evolution of Christian culture from a phenomenological perspective. As Leslie Dewart has concluded: "The phenomenological method is not the diametric opposite of the ontological; it is a more comprehensive one than the latter, whose merits it preserves and whose inadequacies it tries to remedy."¹⁵

Christian Culture and Hellenism

Certain New Testament writers understandably accepted Hellenic ideas presuming them to reflect a universal common experience. They gradually incorporated Hellenic cultural forms which, to their way of thinking, provided a preferential means to express the gospel message thus giving it an interpretive advantage over particular and indigenous cultural forms. However, religious cultural forms, of whatever tradition, are not accidental but consciously and deliberately fashioned to reflect a distinct meaning of experience. Cultural forms also reflect the variation of human experience which is obviously not universally Hellenistic. This point is clearly underscored in the biblical account of Pentecost. Hearing the Apostles speak, the multicultural assembly asked: "How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native

¹⁵ *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (University of Toronto Press, 1989:31).

language?”¹⁶ It is easily recognized that at Pentecost, cultural diversity is not superseded by cultural uniformity.

Further, an assumption erroneously made by later unsophisticated scripture commentators, was that Hellenic philosophical formulations reflected the actual truths about the cosmos and such pagan formulations eventually came to dominate the fashioning of Western primitive Christian cultures. Yet, to its credit, the Hellenic philosophical cosmos does provide, even if unwittingly so, a unique phenomenological matrix for existential philosophers to contemplate and critique.

Many creative philosophers and theologians are not satisfied with the present appearance of Christian culture since it is not experienced as adequate to their religious needs. In this brief undertaking, I examine the notion of “dehellenization” of Christian culture and its institutions as a particular stage in the evolution of a phenomenological religious consciousness. A phenomenological religious consciousness provides a philosophical alternative to the Hellenic philosophical legacy. Dehellenization is a positive term meaning the creation of an alternative culture phenomenon suitable for a future world that does not yet exist. It is more than unhellenization. Unhellenization, as a cultural phenomenon, is merely an updating of the ancient Greek concepts of reality, making them re-appear in modern academic dress to meet the needs of contemporary understanding. That is to say, unhellenization is an *aggiornamento* that does not initiate a new cultural alternative. Without hitting too wide of the mark, then, I define dehellenization as *ressourcement* (a return to the sources of culture) and unhellenization as *aggiornamento*, (a modernization of cultural terminology). Both of these

¹⁶ Acts 2:8 (Jerusalem Bible text)

interpretive terms were applied by Catholic philosophers and theologians to the purposes of Vatican II. In practice it appears that *aggiornamento* had been favoured over *ressourcement*, but as is clear to critical philosophers, mere *aggiornamento* has not been very useful, or successful, in fashioning a satisfactory Christian culture for many of the faithful.

Contemporary Western Christian culture is in danger of failing to sustain its ancient faith as meaningful within the evolution of techno-digital secular culture. Recall the remark of Alexander Jones in footnote number two above: "*The first is the reduction of Christianity to the status of a relic.*" To combat the apparent techno-digital secularism of Western culture, Eastern Orthodox Christians, to this day, assign a way of life and belief to their religious life that preserves the ancient traditional methods of worshipping God in conformity with the early sacred traditions of Christianity. As a denominational culture the Orthodox faithful maintain that they observe the true and sacred doctrine of God in the right or Orthodox way in this world. Within contemporary Western Christianity, however, to many phenomenological philosophers, there is more of the secular world appearing in the sacred institutions than of the sacred institutions appearing in the secular world. That is to say that the unique Christian culture is, in practice, becoming an irrelevant relic within Western society. To my way of thinking, Christian culture being an irrelevant relic, has not been able to evolve within a conscious and specific Christian experience and Christian belief. As a result, many of the ecclesiastical faithful have lost hope for a redeemable future.

I am writing this section of the work during the Advent Season of 2021. And judging by the television, radio and Internet commercials aimed at the general public there is

little evidence that these publicists of the up-coming Christmas season are aware of its Christian origins. Certain philosophers and theologians among the faithful readily recognize this problem through the “phenomenology of religion.” Günter Lanczkowski has noted: “In the study of religions, the phenomenology of religion, unlike history, does not try to trace its growth and changes, but to bring together similar religious phenomena while omitting their historical situations and connections.”¹⁷ However, the lack of an historical history, on the positive side, allows the phenomenologists of religion an attempt at an alternative interpretation of their experience unencumbered by an historical legacy. These attempts have had varying degrees of satisfaction. In addition, Leslie Dewart offers a different but related reason for the apparent absence of Christian consciousness in the Western cultural matrix. Not Christian culture as an irrelevant relic, nor one that lacks an understanding of its history explains the absence of Christian consciousness. He suggests that the faithful have not managed themselves well in their discovery of their creaturely autonomy. He writes:

When Christian philosophers begin to tell people, as St. Thomas did, that they exist in their own right, and give them the premises from which they will in time deduce that they, too, are creators, and that they have a decisive role to play — for better or for worse — in the shaping of themselves, and that it is better to have creatively attempted something and failed than never to have created anything at all, one has to expect that some people — perhaps even most people for a while — will not know just what

¹⁷ s. v. ‘Religion’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates (1975:1392) ed. Karl Rahner.

to do with their discovery and will not quite manage themselves well.¹⁸

It is within the matrix of contemporary Western culture that Catholic phenomenological philosophers and theologians must labour, to the best of their ability, to bring about their particular (though imperfect) interpretation of a Christian culture by assigning to it adequate and appropriate philosophical and theological values. In understanding their assigned values, I follow the observation made by Kurt F. Leidecker, that "from the point of view of values, life ennobles itself, man lifts himself above the trammels of matter, and the world becomes meaning-*full*."¹⁹ Thus, a refashioning of Christian culture by the faithful requires conscious self-reflection on inherited philosophical values. A critical inquiry into the roots of Hellenic philosophy will disclose that even Plato assumed that *human* experience is the only form of experience capable of self-reflection. The only organisms capable of self-conscious reflection are human beings who through an evolutionary process have become self-conscious of their own history, for good or ill. Non-human organisms appear not to have this capacity. In the human organism, consciousness of the *self* arises when the organism differentiates itself from its environment. From a philosophical point of view, an introspective consciousness is a function of the mind, not the brain, which allows for the opposition of subject and object to appear. That is to say consciousness functions in the realm of the transcendent in human experience. In other words, human consciousness evolves and correctly distinguishes between the "I" and "not-I," and the "me" and "not-me" when the brain is not traumatized by some pathogenic

¹⁸ *Foundations of Belief*, Herder and Herder (1969:206).

¹⁹ s. v. 'Nuñez Regüein, Manuel' in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval, Modern* (D. D. Runes, ed.) Littlefield, Adams & Co. 1963 [Leidecker's italics].

cause. And it is only the activity of distinguishing the relationship between the two phenomena, i.e., the brain and the activity of thought in the brain, that constitutes human consciousness.²⁰

To the uncritical philosopher, Hellenic epistemology appears to be self-evident. This observation seems to have been accepted in previous eras but it is no longer so. The recognition and interpretation of multicultural experience demonstrates that there are options in describing human knowledge which may be more adequate than Hellenic epistemology. Biblical hermeneutics and philosophical anthropology are two examples of contemporary academic disciplines that are evolving without the aid of Hellenic epistemology.²¹ That is to say that the philosophical minds of humanity do not necessarily function in accord with the philosophical perspective of the Hellenists and their understanding of being and non-being. In short, there is no philosophical justification for Christian culture to be fashioned as exclusively Hellenistic. Hellenic Christian culture appears as one form among many and contemporary Christian cultures are diversely fashioned to meet the needs of their faithful.

²⁰ An excellent introduction to this realm of thought is Markus Gabriel's *I am Not a Brain: Philosophy of Mind for the Twenty-First Century* Polity Press, 2017.

²¹ Biblical hermeneutics is the investigation of sacred texts by the rules, principles and academic tools which govern the current methodology of scriptural interpretation. Philosophical anthropology is a discipline that seeks to unify the various empirical investigations of human beings, attempting to understand them as creatures of their environment and creators of their own values. Two influential philosophies in this anthropological undertaking are phenomenology and existentialism.

The development of Christian culture, like all culture, starts empirically and it must continue to be fashioned empirically. Christian culture is specified through a communitarian value of positive self-relation, i.e., a loving relationship among the faithful in community.²² Any form of its opposite, i.e., a negative self-isolation, or anti-communitarian attitude is not Christian. From my philosophical point of view, the negative notion of self-isolation or anti-communitarianism began with Cain's reply, "Am I my brother's guardian?" to God's query.²³ Thus, Christian culture evolved, it may be argued, from a reflection on this biblical communitarian aspect of life. That is to say that Christians determine their own actions, for better or worse, within presence of divinity conceived as real or imagined.

All cultures, including Christian cultures, change because human experience continues to evolve as it has done over many millennia. This evolutionary change, increasingly recognized as directed by human beings, makes the growth of all religious culture dependent upon the latest stage of human consciousness thus preventing cultures from becoming fossilized.²⁴ As a phenomenological philosopher I distinguish between two eras of evolution. The more significant era will not be the one that brought humanity down from the trees to become *homo sapiens*. Rather, the more significant era will be recognized as the one that

²² This spiritual value is set forth in the Gospel of John (13:35).

²³ Genesis 4:9 (Jerusalem Bible text).

²⁴ This same phenomenon of evolutionary growth is recognized in biblical hermeneutics. Diane Bergant writes that "the Bible is seen as growing as the people grow, changing as the people change, and becoming standardized [i.e., normative] as the people seek stability." Cf. 'Introduction to the Bible' in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, Liturgical Press (1989:3).

makes it possible for humanity to climb to the stars.²⁵ I recognize that the evolutionary process has not terminated with the arrival of *homo sapiens* on the scene. Evolution is perpetual and requires that the faithful, in a Christian culture at least, consciously and repeatedly re-define themselves in light of their experience since the evolutionary process has not reached its end. In Teilhard de Chardin’s vocabulary, the evolutionary *omega point* has yet to be attained from a Christian perspective. From my phenomenological perspective, the Omega Point is a point of theological speculation that everything in the universe is evolving towards its final goal of divine unification.²⁶ Many of the contemporary faithful believe that the evolution of Christian culture with its transcendental goal, to which the faithful assign meaning, is of greater significance than the evolution of humanity from its pristine “state of nature” to its transcendent goal of political civilization. The phenomenological notion of transcendent secularity in human evolution could not have occurred within Hellenistic philosophy. Hence, the need for a re-assessment of Christian culture.

Philosophical Re-assessment of Christian Culture

The need for a philosophical re-assessment of any culture occurs within the heightened consciousness within human culture. Thus, the heightened consciousness of Catholic

²⁵ Given that philosophy has dominated the former, and that technological science will dominate the latter, has given rise to an existential tension in the interpretation of these two evolutionary eras.

²⁶ The term was coined by the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). He argued that the Omega Point resembles the Christian Logos who draws all things into himself. In the biblical *Book of Revelation*, Christ describes himself as “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” Cf. Revelation 1:8, 21:6, 22:13 (Jerusalem Bible text).

philosophers and theologians calls for a re-assessment of Christian culture. The current interpretation of Christian culture based on Hellenic philosophical concepts which are inadequate, requires the faithful to reconceptualize their inherited philosophical concepts. A re-assessment of philosophy must be done in light of a critical historical interpretation and the recognition that the capacity for human thought processes evolves. In Leslie Dewart's words:

Well, like any other form of the self-heightening of consciousness, philosophy must understand its task as the reorganization of present experience, with an eye towards a projected future mode of consciousness, by means of interpretation of the past.²⁷

Thus, in the re-assessment of Christian culture each stage of evolutionary achievement represents a stage previously unachieved, since the evolutionary thrust is in a forward direction only. Therefore, once made, any new evolutionary achievement is not attained by duplicating previous experience. Christian culture is not an attempt to construct God's prior thoughts and will in this world, as it were. Christian culture is fashioned solely by humans from the point of view of their experience interpreted in the presence of the divinity. This is not to say that God as a reality is absent from the world, but rather that God is recognized as present to the world as an actor, and not as an agent. That is, God has no active role in the fashioning of a Christian culture within a re-assessment of the task of philosophy and theology. Simply because God cannot be objectively "made to appear" directly as an active phenomenon, but is subjectively recognized as a present phenomenon. God's

²⁷ *Foundations of Belief*, Herder and Herder (1969:358).

role is only passive in *affecting* the experience of the faithful. That is to say that from the point of view of phenomenological philosophy, religious interpretation cannot conceptualize God as a being existing *a priori*. God cannot be conceptualized prior to one's experience. Thus, it is obvious to many philosophers and theologians that God, as agent, is the legacy of the literal interpretation of biblical claims beginning with creation. Those scholastically-minded philosophers who posit a literal understanding for biblical claims further entrench the absolute qualities attributed to God, i.e., God is an absolute unity, God is absolute truth, God is absolute mercy, God is absolute justice, etc.

The classical philosophers teach that God's essence does not change and is not subject to evolution, even as an abstract idea. To the contrary, however, whatever appears existentially to the phenomenologist appears contingently since human thinking evolves. Thus, phenomenological notions, which are not ideas in the classical sense, are contingent, even the notion of God. The phenomenological re-assessment of Christian culture permits the option of conceiving God *a posteriori*, that is "after having an experience" of God. The conception of God after such an experience, and the subsequent re-fashioning of Christian culture, varies according to the mental capacity and self-conception of the faithful as evolving human beings. Upon critical reflection it will be noted that the re-assessed Christian conception of God and subsequent re-fashioning of Christian culture influence each other significantly as they evolve.

To be recalled here is that the Christian way of thinking, with its roots in Hellenistic culture, is not a universal way of thinking. This realization among philosophers has given rise to the study of the discipline of contemporary

linguistics and the development of philosophical anthropology. The study of linguistics has its roots in the philosophy of Aristotle and, philosophical anthropology has its roots in the general sociology of culture. Human intervention in the evolutionary process that brings about advancement is the dynamic at work in both linguistics and anthropology. And the function of each is to situate humanity accurately within its existential reality, thereby making the world which humanity knows meaningful. To reveal the meaning of religious experience is the function of all sacred cultures. In practice, however, many Christian cultures which attempt to situate the faithful in the present-day world are often not sufficiently rational and, are not analyzed adequately by the majority of the faithful. They rely too heavily on Christian sentimentality in situating the faithful in the present-day world. Thus, in light of contemporary religious experience a re-assessment of Christian culture is needed from the perspective of reason and critical philosophy.

Christian culture, like all cultures, always remains the product of human conscious experience at whatever evolutionary stage. Only humans can fashion a Christian culture. Phenomenologically understood Christian culture is never revealed by God. However, the loftiest notions of religious culture, assigned by humanity, defy definitive explanation. Yet these lofty notions of religious culture are frequently consciously conceived by philosophers and theologians in terms of useful fictions. Hans Vaihinger (1852-1933) offered justification for such useful fictions according to Otto F. Kraushaar who noted that Vaihinger wrote:

our knowledge rests on a network of artfully contrived fictions which are not verifiable but pragmatically justifiable. While such fictions,

employed in all fields of human knowledge and endeavor, deliberately falsify or circumvent the stream of immediate impressions, they greatly enhance reality.²⁸

In other words, the God of Christian culture is presented as the perfected *fictitious* being who governs in the manner the faithful wish to imitate.

In general, traditional sacred cultures may be understood as the means of bridging the natural gap between religious devotees and transcendental divinity, whether in the monotheistic traditions, or in the various pagan traditions. Contemporary Christian cultures, however, disclose an active and particular self-conceptualization and self-fashioning by the faithful. This means that a Christian culture has no reality outside the experience of the faithful. A Christian culture is fashioned through the direct experience and interpretation of the faithful within their existential matrix. While religious culture specifies the general self-understanding of humanity, a Christian culture is the particular specification of the self-disposition of the faithful towards God who is believed to be revealed uniquely in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Christian culture is not a means for the faithful to arrive at God and at a union with a reality from which they have become deliberately isolated. The opposite is the case. In light of the diversified forward thrust of evolution, Christian culture is a means to move towards authentic plurality (truth) and, real independence (freedom) on the part of the faithful, not towards similarity and co-dependence. Thus, Christian culture is assigned the variety and diversity of meaning arising from human experience within the presence of God.

²⁸ s. v. 'Als Ob' in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient, Medieval, Modern* (D. D. Runes, ed.) Littlefield, Adams & Co. 1963.

That is, once created by God, humans are not dependent upon God for their continuing existence, they exist in their own right.²⁹

Humans are the sole agents in fashioning a Christian culture which is an evolving expression of their consciousness of God. That is to say, as sole agents within a phenomenological philosophical perspective, humanity is not alone in this world, however, humanity is on its own in this world. This independence and feeling of being on its own in this world account for humanity's existential anxiety, or angst, according to Freudian psychoanalysts. Hence the human need to fashion a psychological fiction of religion as compensation for an inadequate societal culture as some psychoanalysts have pointed out.³⁰

The faithful, as a result of being on their own in Western religious culture, have collectively formed a unique religious sub-culture of ecclesiastical institutions intended to compensate for existential anxiety. One of the gravest threats to a contemporary Christian culture derives from the obsolete ecclesiastical institutions which make it possible, in some cases, for a small number of governing officials to effect irrevocable decisions that determine the salvation of the faithful, without at the same time providing sufficient philosophical and theological education to remedy inadequate (and in some cases erroneous) ecclesiastical instruction. Within current ecclesiastical polity, inadequate instruction places individuals governing the Church in theological and philosophical offices which are above their

²⁹ Cf. note 18 above.

³⁰ *The Future of an Illusion*, written in 1927, is an early attempt by Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist, at investigating the origins of society and religion. Understood phenomenologically, his perspective on the role of religion in an inadequate society is a valuable contribution to contemporary cultural studies.

intellectual and moral depth.³¹ An adequate Christian culture does not consist in the restored ideology of an ancient hierarchy, but is an evolutionary phenomenon, fashioned by the faithful, and open to a future which is yet to be determined.

A respected theologian and critic of the Catholic Church, Charles Davis (1923-1999) thought "that in the future all the Churches will disappear ... [because] the institutional Churches will no longer be adequate instruments for the promotion of Christian life."³² After reading his book, I agree with Charles Davis that up to a point the institutional Churches are an inadequate means for promotion of the Christian life as he experienced it. However, in accord with Gregory Baum's perspective, I am convinced that the traditional institutional Churches, as we have inherited them, will not disappear. Nor will they likely undergo any significant and major reform. Rather, they will persevere within the foreseeable future in maintaining their *status quo* within Western culture. However, there is sociological evidence that alternatives to the traditional institutional Churches are arising from within the Christian cultures of the global village. New and authentic Christian communities, neither Roman, Reformed, nor Protestant, capable of meeting the needs of the Christian faithful are beginning to appear. As these communities come into existence, it is highly probable that traditional Churches will continue to exist as a remnant of the past as Christian culture evolves. These new communities of religious

³¹ My remark is an adaptation of Leslie Dewart's observation on the stability of contemporary international politics. Cf. *Foundations of Belief* (Herder and Herder, 1969:478, note 2).

³² Quoted by Gregory Baum in *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (Herder and Herder, 1968:177). Baum's book challenged the negative conclusions by Charles Davis in *A Question of Conscience* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1967).

understanding, as they evolve both philosophically and theologically, will be disclosed as a contemporary “do-it-yourself affair” of religious re-assessment more than at any previous time in history. From this perspective one may consider the monastic reform of the 11th century as an early attempt at forming new non-traditional ecclesial communities.³³

³³ August Franzen notes that “it was only with the monastic reform of the 11th century that awareness of the Church as such was quickened. The signs of deterioration in that period (wealth, secularization, feudalism) were opposed by the ideals of the *ecclesia primitiva*, the *imitatio Christi* and the *vita apostolica*. A new self-understanding began to emerge in the Church.” s. v. “Church History (Historiography)” in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:258 (ed. Karl Rahner).

PART TWO

CHRISTIAN CULTURE AS AN ASSIGNED VALUE: A “NEW TO YOU” VIEW

Christian Culture Consists of Assigned Values

I intend this section to be an application of the phenomenological perspective presented in Part One. Thus, there is bound to be some repetition but I think it is necessary for clarity of my arguments. From a phenomenological perspective, I recognize that all cultures disclose their assigned values through differing and various human behaviours. Cultures do not only disclose human values through political or artistic craftsmanship, however, but also through the heightened consciousness of all human endeavours. Two new endeavours, clarified through a heightened human consciousness, are the effects of the new techno-digital sciences and the Internet. In other words, culture reveals how humans consciously shape their environment by means of new inventions. Christian culture is but one specific component of a larger cultural matrix disclosed through the philosophy of appearances, i.e., phenomenology. By assigned value I mean *worth* or *goodness*, whether as a subjective notion, or as an objective ideal, that humans attribute to observable phenomena. Most cultures are thus in a creative state of perpetual development under the impetus of a worthwhile human-directed evolution. It is also possible that the inadequate and irrelevant aspects of an evolving culture can dissolve over time. That is to say, positively or negatively, cultures are never static.

What specifically, then, is recognized as a Christian culture in phenomenological point of view? A large indiscriminate aggregate of individuals does not suffice to constitute

recognition as a Christian culture. A Christian culture requires the recognition of characteristics of a particular philosophical and theological sort that appear among individuals in its population. At least some of the faithful constituting a Christian culture must be philosophers and theologians after the mind and consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth, as was first recognized at Antioch.³⁴ In addition, pastors must be recognized as a necessary element within a religious culture for it to be called Christian.³⁵ Further, the notions and appropriate sentiments of individuals constituting a Christian culture must be able to be identified as oriented to the ends and purposes of an ecclesial community. Within phenomenological interpretation Christian culture discloses an evident separation from non-Christian religious cultures, as well as secular culture in the world. Even though there may be philosophical and ethical values shared in common, such cultures are not identical. Within a phenomenological perspective, certain aspects of differentiation, but not separation, are recognized among cultures identified as Christian.³⁶ Contemporary Christian culture is frequently dominated by inherited theological perspectives and contingent social structures, the origin of which the majority of the faithful are often unconscious. A naïve level of intellectual thought and the ready acceptance of religious sentimentality often formulate Christian cultures reflecting more of the temporal values of this world than of the spiritual values of this world. Given these cultural facts, a Christian culture can easily generate

³⁴ Acts 11:26.

³⁵ Ephesians 4:11.

³⁶ In classical ecclesiology these aspects of differentiation are recognized as denominational differences, but expressed within the ultimate ideological conviction of the visible union of the Church of Christ. A phenomenologically recognized ecclesiology, however, from a different perspective, discloses the experience of a relational unity among the Churches of Christ without the necessity of visible union.

intolerance and competition in place of broad-minded and cooperative philosophical and theological insight. Here one need but recall to mind the political wars of religion and penal laws against the infidel throughout Western religious history.

A Christian culture displays the values assigned by the faithful of whatever nationality, profession, or sex, having been deliberately brought together because of a common faith. Assigned values are not brought together by chance, but by deliberate choice. As well, mentally competent individuals are free to opt out of a Christian culture by choice. In mentally competent individuals there is no external or internal philosophical necessity that justifiably compels belief. Individuals living in a pathological mental state, however, are in a different classification which has limited their freedom of personal choice. From within a phenomenological point of view, a Christian culture is disclosed as a subjective, and more comprehensive phenomenon, than the objective phenomenon of traditional scholastic philosophy.³⁷ Further, under certain historical circumstances, the experience of the territorially diverse faithful was very different within the early period of Christian missionary expansion. By way of example, where Orthodox and Catholic missionary expansion overlapped the Orthodox Churches successfully adapted themselves to local customs and cultures becoming Greek, Russian, or Ukrainian Christians, etc. Whereas, the Latin or Roman Catholic Church tended to dominate the local customs and cultures and imposed a uniform formulation of the faith converting the so-called infidels. Thus, in Western Christendom a hierarchy of rights appeared with its centre in Rome, whereas in the East a dispersed pattern of authority appeared within the territorially self-regulated

³⁷ Recall Leslie Dewart's remark in footnote 15.

churches. I paraphrase Bernhard Schultze remarks that the Orthodox Churches today are spread over the whole world and have no strict union, but are made up of a number of separate national Churches having initially grouped together according to patriarchs, and later as autocephalous Churches, some of which are at variance with each other.³⁸

Individuals participate in Christian cultures to varying degrees of involvement. Some very frequently, some very rarely. As well, individuals interpret, at various levels of philosophical sophistication and theological conviction, the articles of faith embedded in a Christian culture. Usually, however, the sentiments, ideas and notions of all the faithful of a Christian culture are ultimately focused in one and the same direction with minimal doctrinal variance. That is to say that the plurality of Christian cultures appears to strive for the ultimate religious unity of eternal salvation as their final goal. Their intention is not ultimate disunity. However, striving for the ultimate goal of salvation, when taken to an extreme, often causes previously stable, individually competent and unique personalities to vanish as they are subsumed into a fantasy of eutopian Christian culture, or various illusory religious sects. Such individuals appear as religious fanatics, in a disapproving sense and, do not truly represent authentic *catholic* Christian culture. Authentic Christian culture, catholic, reformed or protestant, however, discloses a collective, competent and religious consciousness whose cultural enhancement evolves under human direction as long as the faithful remain critically cognizant of what they believe. In its collective religious consciousness Christian culture reveals some clearly defined societal and humanitarian values. And

³⁸ s. v. 'Eastern Churches: E. The Orthodox' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:383 (ed. Karl Rahner).

as such Christian culture is subject to the evolutionary process of social behaviour characteristic of all human groups.

As noted above, it is evident that it is not by the mere fact of human individuals finding themselves randomly side by side that they are assigned the character of a Christian culture. To be assigned the characteristics of a Christian culture certain predisposing factors are necessary and their significance for that culture must be determined. Christian cultures are dispersed cultures. Within Christian culture the formation of a common consciousness, which is the primary characteristic of a Christian classical culture, does not necessitate that the faithful live in one physical location. Thousands of dispersed Christians are capable of living out their particular religious convictions and motivations within an alien culture. In a similar manner and in most cases, the dispersed devotees of non-Christian or pagan religions can choose to worship their gods within the established values of a monotheistic national identity. The issue of religious meanings in contemporary secular cultures becomes political when a governing agency attempts to assign *rights* to religious movements within the general public sphere. Regulating religious rights in the particular public sphere of governance, however, is the current function of *laïcité* which I discuss briefly below.

As just noted, with respect to religious belief, there is no need for hundreds of individuals to be gathered together physically to form a religious culture. Contemporary Christian cultures derive their phenomenal being from the Nazarene’s “discourse on the Church” who taught that, in effect, prayer and earthly community transcend cultural limitations.³⁹ On the other hand, and again from a

³⁹ Cf. Matthew 18:19-20 (Jerusalem Bible text).

phenomenological perspective, a particular nation-state may manifest a Christian culture to some degree by simply demonstrating the values of the said Nazarene in its legislative policies. Even so, Church/State relationships are evolving into a Church/State *and* World relationship. As Karl Rahner has noted:

Today it is a question of the relation between the Church and the *world*. And the “world” is envisaged as it is experienced at the present time – as a history of humanity as a single whole, and as a world which is not simply an antecedent datum, a situation of interest solely in the perspective of salvation. It is a world planned and produced by man himself and it therefore concerns man even in its empirically observable importance. This new way of raising the question was plainly seen at Vatican II. ... For the Church lives in a divided Christendom, a world of many non-Christian higher religions, a pluralist society in which the State with its authority has a quite different function from its task in an ideologically homogeneous society.⁴⁰

A Christian culture is assigned certain specific doctrinal beliefs by the faithful (even though many of these beliefs turn out to be provisional) in light of their understanding of the faith. The evolutionary development of the Christian Creeds is a significant example of this.⁴¹ It follows that the existential constitution of a Christian culture, since it is not revealed, may be appropriately modified according to human experience. Further, various Christian cultures are

⁴⁰ s. v. ‘Church and World’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* [Rahner’s italics] Burns & Oates, 1975:238 (ed. Karl Rahner).

⁴¹ The controversy over the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed is an example of cultural variance.

recognized phenomenologically and shown to be differentiated from secular cultures while maintaining a commitment to a common faith. That is to say that not all Christian cultures need to be fashioned in the same manner. As the Council Fathers have noted, “the circumstances of life today have undergone such profound changes on the social and cultural level that one is entitled to speak of a new age of human history, hence new ways are opened up for the development and diffusion of culture.”⁴²

It is not easy to describe the collective consciousness of Christian cultures with accuracy, because their phenomenological appearance varies not only according to race and political composition, but also according to the particularity and sophistication of the philosophical and theological belief which supports Christian culture. Yet, the phenomenological interpretation of history illustrates that Christian cultures contain the potential for philosophical advancement that discloses a new role for the faithful in the evolution of a Christian culture. The faithful are active participants, not passive observers, in the formation of contemporary Christian culture. Ironically, the faithful are simply reclaiming their responsibility (previously usurped by the Constantinian model of government) that was their inherent right in the early Church. Alternatively, one might inquire, how was it that the non-Christian and pre-Constantinian multi-cultures that were tolerated within the society of the time, as evidenced at Pentecost, which under the imperial culture of the emperor Diocletian became subject to a hierarchical and tyrannical political force?⁴³

⁴² “Gaudium et Spes” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, para. 54) in Austin Flannery (ed) *Vatican Council II* Dominican Publications & Costello Publishing (1996).

⁴³ Pentecost marks the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other (multicultural) followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-31). And as August Franzen has noted: “Once Christianity became a historical

As is evident through history some Christian cultures have become colonizing cultures. It is only within an advanced stage of philosophical and theological insight that new and special political organizations infused with the faith of a particular race, as an advanced assigned value, lead to religious colonialization. Religious colonization, if abused by a missionary power, often turns the indigenous peoples against their Christian colonizers which fosters a return to their pre-colonial spiritual and cultural practices. However, even if the return to a pre-colonial spiritual and cultural practice is successful, a vestige of colonial Christian culture frequently remains as an unacknowledged trace of the colonizer’s presence.⁴⁴

Among the religious values of various cultures there are some *secular* philosophies that are seen as common in all Western religious communities. The secular philosophical value most commonly recognized is the discipline of psychology. A recognizable psychological phenomenon, often easily identified within Christian cultures, is that certain individuals, regardless of the level of their cultural sophistication, often descend into a Christian “crowd” possessing a collective consciousness. This makes them act in a manner characteristically different from when each individual acted independently. In support of this observation, I recall the work of Gustave Le Bon (1841-

factor (beginning of the 2nd century) Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire. This persecution was in three phases. The last and severest of them [was] under Diocletian.” s. v. ‘Church History: D. Periodization and Survey’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:263 (ed. Karl Rahner).

⁴⁴ By way of secular example many colonial Irish post office “pillar” mail boxes are still in use today, which bear the crowned cipher of King Edward VII (1901-1910) Originally painted a bright red, the Irish simply painted these pillar boxes a patriotic shade of green after the revolution founding of the Republic in 1922.

1931) set forth in a book entitled, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* first published in 1895.⁴⁵

There are certain transcendental ideas and feelings which do not ordinarily become noticed in the secular culture of the West. Such transcendental ideas and feelings appear extraordinarily, however, and are transformed into religious activity due to the influence of Christian sub-cultures within the dominant secular culture. Hence, a secular culture may appear as if acting religiously in practice, but not be religious in fact. Appearing to act religiously in the West is often classified phenomenologically as *humanism*. The Christian cultures gave birth to the values of humanism as the values inherited from the classically religious faithful waned, which in turn, fashioned the secular values and cultures of the world. That is, secular values evolved from religious values. Christian cultures, as they lose their corporate political influence, leave a legacy of religiously-minded individuals acting as leaven in the loaf of civil society.⁴⁶ Thus, as long as the remaining religiously-minded individuals of a waning Christian culture continue to live they will likely inaugurate a new sense of the

⁴⁵ Le Bon discusses the phenomenon of the lowest level of intelligence (in terms of psychology) as it appears when a crowd is formed in society through the influence of the collective popular mind. To the contrary, in this work, I contemplate the phenomenon of the highest level of intelligence (in terms of philosophy) as it appears in a culture formed by the influence of an educated and critical consciousness.

⁴⁶ Cf. Matthew 13:33. Interpreting this verse an Orthodox Christian Commentary states that "the leaven represents the disciples, who according to Theophylact, began just as a few men, but 'soon encompassed the whole earth.' [The leaven] also stands for faith entering a person's soul, which causes an inward growth of virtue. This soul will become godlike and can receive even angels." *The Orthodox Study Bible*. © 2008, The Academic Community of St Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, Elk Grove, California. (Thomas Nelson Publisher).

kingdom of God, albeit, a temporal kingdom. Some phenomenological theologians might go so far as to interpret that the temporal kingdom of God, like the mustard seed and leaven, is unpretentious in its beginning but destined for enormous growth outside its initial matrix.

Within the phenomenon of Christian culture there is no unified summing-up or standardization of human experience. That is, there is no definitive appearance to a Christian culture as it evolves. One reason for this lack of definitive appearance is that the same observation, i.e., Christian culture, is perceived quite differently by phenomenological philosophers and classical philosophers. Phenomenological philosophers employ a contemporary interpretive methodology appropriate to the experience of the faithful. Classical philosophers, on the other hand, employ an outdated scholastic methodology not suitable to the contemporary experience of the faithful. Further, an additional interpretive issue is that modern psychology has usurped the traditional role of philosophy in interpreting Western thinking. Depth psychologists and psychoanalysts have disclosed the unacknowledged motives for personal behaviour operating within the contemporary human mind which were previously inaccessible to philosophers. Within the general population, I suggest that an inadequate philosophy, combined with unacknowledged personal motives result in a social pathology that often escapes observation by the ordinary faithful.

Human beings possess instincts, passions, and feelings to varying degrees that are very similar but not identical in each individual. Thus, it seems that in a critical interpretation of the experience of religion, politics, morality, the affections, etc., only a minority are able to rise above the basic standard of ordinary individuals who make up the masses in a population. Within a phenomenological

point of view the cultural elite appear, in any society, as a minority, whereas the masses of ordinary people are the majority of the society. Further, the mental characteristic that specifies humanity is common to the majority and to the minority of individuals, that is self-reflexive consciousness. The elite and the masses of society are able to think for themselves. To the discerning observer it is clear that a Christian culture is fabricated to appeal to the masses, yet it ultimately becomes the common property of both the elite and the masses. Within such common property of Christian culture, the specific intellectual abilities and aptitudes of individuals tend to the equalization of the lowest common cultural denominator. The result being that the elite become isolated within their own cultural matrix and they are often relegated to academic institutions.

The very fact that Christian culture is inclusive of common ordinary experience explains why it can never disclose a particularly high degree of insight and intellectual sophistication. The truth is that a Christian culture, fashionably influenced by the masses, predominately discloses the lowest common denominator of experience of the faithful and thus a mediocre quality of life. However, within contemporary Christian culture there is evidence of the phenomenon of advanced knowledge which is found in the specialized centres of learning. Popular Christian culture frequently ignores the participation of faithful who possess a higher degree of insight and a higher level of philosophical sophistication. An enhanced quality of life which is the acknowledged modern birthright of every human individual as a cultural and social fact is rarely dominant in religious cultures. An enhanced quality of life, as a cultural and social fact, is an existential work of *scientific* progress that needs an appropriate interpretive philosophy that is currently lacking. That is to say that

scientists of the purely techno-digital sort cannot assign philosophical meaning to the data they discover. As scientists their existential function is to be distinguished from the existential function of philosophers. Techno-digital scientists only show *that* something is, not *why* it is, nor what it means for humanity. Those are questions to which the critical phenomenological philosopher can assign meaning. In a similar vein, it morally questionable in this day and age that a mediocre Christian culture offers ultimate salvation through a transcendental spiritual life often discounting the evolutionary psychological needs of the faithful. Thus, at the level of modern clinical psychological sophistication and practice, the philosophy and theology that supports contemporary Christian culture appears to be in opposition to a techno-digital scientific consciousness. I suggest, therefore, that an appropriate philosophy of science, which is yet to be established, is required for proper disclosure in existential experiences. The question then arises: How are religious experiences within a higher degree of techno-digital understanding and scientific intellectual speculation to be philosophically addressed within a Christian culture? Clearly, traditional answers cannot satisfy this need. A phenomenological interpretation is needed.

Returning to my immediate theme of assigning values, there are different affections that are disclosed within Christian cultures that motivate individuals. One affection is that there is a sense of (blessed) assurance engendered within members of like-minded groups of the faithful that is often not evident when individuals are left to act in isolation. The individual truly living the values of a Christian community, in a secular culture, acquires a fulfilling certainty about life which he or she experiences as the lack of dread or angst arising from a threat to life. Another affection is the realization and acquisition of

supportive collective beliefs. The Christian culture is a cultivated phenomenon disclosing the collective beliefs that support the denominational history of particular groups of the faithful and religious devotees. The participant in classical (denominational) Christian culture experiences the sense of a unique relationship with a common undefinable transcendental being when in the company of similar like-minded participants. Upon critical examination, however, often this particular affection is phenomenologically revealed to be a mistaken belief on the part of the faithful. What is conceived of as an undefinable transcendental being, is but a transcendent presence (a religious affection) that has been inaccurately and erroneously elevated to the status of a transcendental being which the individual and the community have identified and classified as God. Thus, in extreme cases within a Christian culture a deeply religious personality, and a deeply religious community, understandably experience a high degree of exaltation in which all feelings and thoughts are realized into the *objective* existence of a being and, not experienced as an *affective* presence, identified as God. Through its liturgies and prayerful gatherings, then, a contemporary Christian culture affords an opportunity for the individual and for the community to promote the values of a subjective experience of a transcendental being, whether real or fictional.⁴⁷ Such an opportunity is extremely unlikely, if not impossible, in classical (scholastic) Christian culture.

In Christian culture the self-assignment of a common purpose by the faithful to their behaviour constitutes the basis for Christianity to appear as a religious phenomenon. That is, Christianity is not a theory, but an existential

⁴⁷ Should the transcendental concept being (i.e., value originating in *another* world) ultimately be deemed fictional, it does not follow that the transcendent notion of presence (i.e., value originating in *this* world) must be deemed fictional as well.

reality. And as history and evolution have demonstrated, existential Christian philosophers need not continue to accept the values of Hellenic philosophy as definitive. The values of alternative philosophies are available. Traditionally, by the observable fact that the faithful fashioned a variety of Christian cultures illustrates that they ascended several rungs up the ladder of civilization, as it were. That is to say, Christian culture discloses an internal diversity of belief that ultimately fashioned the various distinct tribal values, that is the Ecclesiastical Rites, into a "new life" transcendental community (the Church triumphant) which subsists within the experience of the faithful. This is the classical understanding which locates the origin of the Church outside history. To my mind a more adequate understanding for our time is the phenomenological one which realizes that the faithful are members of a transcendent society (the Church militant) as an earthly phenomenon which has existed in the past, is existing in the present, and will exist in the future, but always within this world and within no other. The Church exists as long as humans exist. This understanding locates the Church within history.

The conclusion I draw from what has preceded is that a Christian culture is almost always intellectually fashioned for the masses, not for a learned society. Certain political elites within the masses, however, may attempt to co-opt Christian culture to control the masses as history has adequately shown. Yet, critical philosophical and theological individuals within a culture, as a rule, do not share this agenda. Further, the laity within a Christian culture may, according to circumstances, disclose actions better or worse than those supported by the governing elites (the hierarchy) among the faithful. These flaws notwithstanding, doubtless a Christian culture is intended to promote enhanced human values, but, unless critiqued

philosophically and theologically Christian culture is likely to fail in promoting humanizing societal values as witnessed through centuries of ecclesiastical scandals.

The history of Western religions has shown that the Crusades, the Inquisition and like movements have arisen within the negative values espoused by Christian cultures. My main point here is simply to suggest that Christian cultures are not determined by humanizing values alone. Christian cultures are fashioned according to the positive or negative values of the humans who constitute them. Depending upon these attitudes, constructive or destructive, Christian cultures provide the matrix in which religious beliefs are formulated.

In some Christian cultures the more profound beliefs tend to become dogmatically standardized and, in some cases, irreformable. The more profound beliefs are, 1) the worship of a supposed superior being, 2) the dread of, or attraction to, the power of that being, often with blind submission to its commands, 3) the philosophical reluctance to critique the dogmatic formulation of religious beliefs, 4) the felt need to promote inherited doctrinal formulations, and 5) a tendency to consider all who do not accept Christian values as the infidel. Also, in many Christian cultures supernatural and miraculous events can be seen as variations of parallel pre-Christian events. Some Christian cultures submit the temporal power to the supernatural rituals of a mystery cult, or claim power through their revered leaders who command unconditional obedience, and in some extreme cases allow intolerance and fanaticism to accompany Christian sentiment. Such Christianized, but uncriticized, beliefs are evident in the actions of those devotees who believe themselves to be in the possession of the secret of earthly happiness and eternal salvation. Intolerance and fanaticism are two characteristics evident in contemporary Christian

culture that, to some degree, promote negative aspirations among the faithful.⁴⁸ A phenomenological anthropological and historical analysis discloses that both Christian and pagan cultures, when fashioned so as to dominate the human conscience, often exercise inordinate and inappropriate power over the minds of the devotees under their influence. Thus, to my mind, the Council Father's statement can be interpreted in this manner. "From this it follows that it is wrong for a public authority [ecclesiastical or civil] to compel its citizens [faithful or irreligious] by force or fear or any other means to profess or repudiate any religion or to prevent anyone from joining or leaving a religious body."⁴⁹ Interpreted in this manner freedom of conscience as a worthwhile value evident in an organism specifies a human being.

It must not be supposed by anyone that God or the gods are the superstitions of a bygone age which scientific reason has banished. The theology of contemporary Christian culture has never been vanquished in its supposed conflict with reason. I note that despite the lack of explicate Christian influence, secular culture retains the meaning of the words, *divinity* and *sacred* (or their equivalents) to an effective degree such that when the old God, or gods die, new ones are invented complete with newly fashioned statues, altars and temples erected in their honour.⁵⁰ It is

⁴⁸ I consider that the activity to convert all humanity, against its will, to Christian salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) is a negative aspiration.

⁴⁹ "Dignitatis Humanae" (Declaration on Religious Liberty, para. 6) in Austin Flannery (ed) *Vatican Council II* Dominican Publications & Costello Publishing (1996). The contemporary significance of this interpretation should become evident from the monograph on *laïcité* presented below

⁵⁰ By way of example, in a modern culture one might argue that secular ideologies that support a neutral Government presence, i.e.,

commonplace to believe and assert, within the Western tradition, that a Christian culture is necessarily revealed to and for the masses, because all divine, political and societal creeds cannot arise solely from the unaided efforts of the masses. In the experience of some phenomenological philosophers, religions need not disclose a sacred character. If it were possible to convince the masses to unreservedly adopt atheism and anti-theistic beliefs they would reflect a secular, yet possibly pseudo-religious culture, but not a sacred culture as traditionally understood. Such a culture, it seems to me, would soon give rise to political domination by secular cults. The now defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) comes to mind here. I consider below what might become of Christian culture given the option of atheism, or Christian culture appearing as an outdated philosophical and societal phenomenon?

A Philosophical Critique of Christian Culture

Only a provisional and limited answer can be given in this section considering Christian culture as a phenomenon for philosophical assessment. That is to say for the purpose of philosophical assessment I contrast the appearance of things as they are perceived by the mind and assigned their meaning, as opposed to things as they are in and for themselves without any assigned meaning. I do not interpret Christian culture as a conceptual archetypical Idea characterizing Platonic teaching which has been introduced into Christian scholasticism. Contemporary Christian culture is not an idealistic social structure understood to be revealed by God to the faithful. Rather, I interpret Christian

Liberté, égalité, fraternité and *E pluribus unum*, as slogans, appear to replace the spiritual purpose of religious statues with the worldly purpose of humanity; and appear, as societal phenomena, to replace traditional churches and temples with banks and financial institutions that transact large-scale monetary exchanges.

culture to reflect a dynamic human phenomenon perpetually open to intellectual evolution, particularly through an existential philosophical interpretation. It is probable that the philosophical perspective put forward by Ludwig Feuerbach in his *Essence of Christianity*, written in 1841, in which he discusses God from various perspectives as a *notional being*, or a “being of the understanding,” would assist the reader in following my arguments. Further, I maintain that the task of contemporary philosophy has been correctly identified by Moritz Schlick (1882-1936).⁵¹ He maintained that a philosophical clarification of many of the great questions which surface in ordinary human life is needed very badly. I am in agreement. Thus, a main thesis in this work that needs clarification is that Christian culture is interpreted (mistakenly) to be tantamount to a revelation from a God, which many of the faithful continue to promote given the presumed agency of God.

In general, by culture I mean an alteration of the inherited pre-Anthropocene environment, through the process of evolution directed by humans. This dynamic involvement in evolution results in the adaptation by individuals to cultural developments and in adaptations to the human disciplines of art, philosophy, science and technology. Christian culture specifically fashioned in the anthropocene

⁵¹ Moritz Schlick, was a German physicist and philosopher who “made a lasting mark in the philosophical memory by his role as the nominal leader of the Vienna Circle of Logical Positivists, his most lasting contribution includes a broad range of philosophical achievements.” (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schlick/>, accessed 8 October, 2021.) His significance for this essay lies in his “logically revised correspondence view of the nature of truth [and] a systematic epistemology based on the distinction of (immediate) experience and (relational) knowledge.” s. v. ‘Schlick, Moritz’ in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient-Medieval-Modern* Littlefield, Adams & Co. 1963 (ed. D. D. Runes).

age has deliberate effects on sacred institutions, customs, and societal organizations, thus establishing an enhanced sociological value for global cultures. For an introduction to the social value of religion from a Western perspective one would do well to consult the two-volume set, *The Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Sociological Theory*, with formal international contributions which outline secular and religious foundation theory.⁵²

A key word in this essay concerning human behaviour is *agency*, of which only humans are capable. Other entities, animate or inanimate, do move or undergo *action*, however, these actions are without deliberate moral consequences. Agency, in the sense that I use it here, is not to be identified merely as *cause* in either the physical or metaphysical sense of the word. Agency is conscious human intervention with a deliberate moral or ethical intent. When a rotting tree falls in a forest, no agency is involved, only action; the cause of the fall is, without any moral consequences, the rottenness of the wood. Non-human animals are conscious, but not in the human capacity of understanding their own specificity or assigning moral intent to their actions. That is to say, cats and dogs do not know that they are either cats or dogs, or know why, it is that one seems to automatically chase the other. The fact is that humans assign these animals their species and biological status within a Western scientific and philosophical perspective.

Social facts, as opposed to modern scientific facts, are those which arise from interpreted experience, and not from mere observation and (mathematical) calculation. Social facts are acts interpreted as phenomena by the human mind.

⁵² *The Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Sociological Theory*, eds. T. Parsons, E. Shils, K. Naegle and J. R. Pitts (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

They are not theoretical which means that Idea and Social Fact are not to be equated. Philosophically, Ideas are external to the mind and exist independently and easily shared among many minds. Whereas, Social Facts are personal and contingent, and their meaning depends upon the individual interpretation of experience. They are not easily shared among many minds. That the two are not identical, but arise from different philosophical perspectives, is significant because, as noted previously, existential philosophy (phenomenology) which gives rise to Social Facts, and classical philosophy (ontology) which gives rise to Ideas are not irreconcilable opposites.

Social facts are notions which are relationally true within human existential experience, not absolutely true as corresponding to the theoretical Ideas which are abstracted from experience. Social facts disclose the truth of human fabrication which appears through existential philosophy. Social facts do not disclose the truth of theoretical intellectual activity. Social facts are phenomena that are not metaphysical or logical abstractions like numbers. Social error, that is, illusion, is but a misconception of experience on the part of the individual. Existential or experiential error can be known only *after* it is experienced by the knower; not while the knower is experiencing it. (In mathematics error results from the human miscalculation of logical ideas, i.e., numbers.) Social facts, as actual events, are experienced only in the present. Social facts have no real past, nor real future in themselves and therefore, nothing imported from the past or future, except as a memory or speculation, can be experienced as social fact. Social facts that occurred in the past appear in the imagination as a *memory experienced*, and future action appears in the imagination as *speculation anticipated*. As an example, an individual living in the present moment cannot experience the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, a

past event, in the present moment. The coronation can only be recalled, directly or indirectly, in the present moment via an individual's memory. Directly by having been present, indirectly by having read about it. Within my philosophical perspective, Christian cultures as social facts are phenomenal realities selectively abstracted by the mind from an aggregate matrix of experience presented to the human intellect for interpretation. The monkeys of Bali make no such intellectual abstraction within the matrix of things around them. I see no reason to believe that the monkeys of Bali roaming through the temples know that the temples were built by humans for a particular purpose. The temple stones are just objects within the monkey's environment whose artful arrangement is not distinguished from an aggregate collection of rocks on the jungle floor. Christian cultures are not simply a natural constituent within an antecedent human culture, but they have been uniquely and mysteriously fashioned within the evolution of human culture and have disclosed a new consciousness and a transcendent way of being human. Christian culture, in effect, represents a new approach and effort at striving to achieve a perfected humanity.

This new consciousness and a transcendent way of being human introduce into Christian cultures a philosophical consideration of theology's role in interpreting Christian values. The role of contemporary theology is, in fact, nothing but the realization of a Christian anthropology of values. In the light of contemporary anthropological studies, I suggest that the human condition and its relationships are perfected first in one's mind through the imagination and then projected, as an on-going activity, onto future human behaviour. When this projection is successful the speculative imaginations of theology (i.e., theories) transform into the societal reality of Christian cultures. Thus, the mystery of Christian culture today is

best articulated through an existential anthropology and not through a classical theological theory of human nature. That is because the meaning of Christian culture is assigned by the faithful as realized within their experience. The meaning of Christian culture is not to be found in the imaginative speculation of a particular philosophical perspective, i. e., the Hellenistic metaphysics of scholasticism. Rather, I understand the meaning of Christian culture to be found in the disclosure of who or what humanity is, not who or what God is. In light of the above, then, I consider the possibility of an alternative recognition of contemporary Christian culture through phenomenological consciousness.

The Phenomenological Recognition of Christian Culture

It is through human consciousness that the recognition of Christian culture occurs. Only humans develop any recognition of religious cultures. On a biological level human consciousness is distinguished from brute consciousness in that the brute is not conscious of itself as belonging to a species, however, humans are conscious of themselves as belonging to a species. It is the capacity for self-classification that specifies the human organism among other organisms. Obviously, individuals possess varying degrees of consciousness and are not uniformly conscious. They are also limited by the conceptual range of their minds.

Pre-modern science, as a philosophy, is distinguished from contemporary techno-digital science as a discipline of human calculation in that pre-modern science presupposed certain beliefs; i.e., the belief in another (transcendental) world, the belief in the oneness of nature and the belief in the rationality of the natural (biological) processes. It is within the cultural matrix of these presupposed classical

beliefs that the modern conscious self-reflective discipline of human calculation, i.e., techno-digital science, arose through the process of evolution.

Christian culture is a creative phenomenon arising from the interpretation of experience of the faithful. As mentioned above the brute animal is not self-conscious of its experience. Brute animal consciousness does not extend itself beyond its own existential domain, therefore, the brute animal does not recognize itself as being responsible for any culture, religious or otherwise. That is to say that brute animals cannot project their affections (as perfected concepts of their nature) into the future. That is, they can conceive no fictional idea, nor fashion any imaginary notion that reflects their better selves. In contrast, the human capacity for self-consciousness has perfected a notion of what it means to be a better person and projected it into the future as the (fictional) notion of God. Among the contemporary faithful, phenomenological philosophers in contemplating Christian culture generate the notion of God within their experience of Western culture. The notion of God is not imported into their experience from without. I further argue that human self-consciousness gives rise to the recognition of a variety of religious cultures within the global context depending upon a specific cultural matrix. To my mind, human self-consciousness specifies the human being as the highest form of existential reality expressed in either a hierarchical or a nodal order.⁵³

⁵³ By nodal I mean the philosophical and sociological model that is not hierarchical in the classical sense, but is a modern intellectual model abstracted from the physical pattern of the human brain. The nodal pattern consists of multiple centres that are connected through non-vertical and non-horizontal trajectory pathways. That is to say that the nodal pattern is not hierarchical with an apex as an omega point, but is an irregularly formed pattern lacking an apex or omega point due to the autonomous function of many centres performing limited

Historically, the first astronomers were primitive philosophers. I believe it is fair to conclude from an historical perspective that the Hellenist thinkers were the first to try to explain how the universe worked in a logical, systematic manner using various models and observations. Current Western philosophers are more sophisticated but for most their roots remain in the ancient Greek tradition of thought. However, many contemporary theologians, with their roots in the experience of Christian culture, give meaning to the cosmos in light of an anthropological philosophy. In short, Christian theology is anthropological philosophy. Anthropological philosophers make a distinction between two theological values; one is an ontological theology of *abstract* being which conceives being as essence. The other is a pastoral theology of *praxis*, which conceives being as existential.⁵⁴ In the minds of many of the faithful, Christian anthropological philosophy amounts to a sufficient practical defense against atheism, arising from the modern scientific understanding of religious culture, that seems to challenge the theological interpretations that have fashioned the religious cultures of the past.

functions. In this sense the nodal pattern is truly democratic with no centralized authority.

⁵⁴ The Fathers at Vatican II acknowledged such a distinction when they envisioned the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) as ontological theology and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) as practical, or pastoral, theology. As Albert Keller has noted: "among Catholic theologians a positive verdict on secularization is gaining ground and influence, which showed itself at Vatican II, due chiefly to the representatives of this view among the theologians attached to the Council, like Y. Congar and K. Rahner. An example is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World." s.v. 'Secularization: The present state of the discussion' in in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:1560.

This defense is applicable particularly within the cultures rooted in the Hebrew, Christian and Islamic traditions. Humans consciously assign meaning to their experience of Christian and non-Christian cultures. The objective significance of a Christian culture is ultimately to be found in the subjective attitude of the believer, and not externally and independently in the culture itself. Thus, human consciousness concludes that there is no Christian, or secular meaning external to itself inherent in the cosmos or the world. It is legitimate therefore, to recognize that brute animals, populating the external world of humans, even if they are aware of their environmental matrix, assign no meaning to it or to themselves.

Christians consciously project onto a culture that lacks an improved and perfected future the enduring values and qualities of Christian experience. However, regardless of religious persuasion humanity is governed by measured time, not simply duration. Thus, for the existential philosopher the past has been realized in practice, the present is being realized in practice and the future is yet to be realized in practice. Since one's understanding of the dynamic praxis, or fashioning of Christian culture, may be expressed within a nodal pattern, the disclosure of God in a Christian culture, past, present and future, may also be seen within a nodal pattern. That is to say "God" is recognized as a phenomenon dispersed throughout creation and not reserved to a unique location within creation. There are no sacred locations to meet God, but God's presence makes all creation sacred, (and in phenomenological philosophy) abolishes the sacred and profane. This is a good time to recall the ancient observation of Thales: "all things are full of gods."

The unique aspect of Christian culture amounts to recognizing the unique presence of God in a

phenomenological relationship understood as Revelation. However, from a secular perspective there is a recognition of the humanitarian values somewhat evident in global cultures due to a desire for harmony and cosmic order within communities not influenced by Christianity. Thus, within Christian culture the source of perfected human self-realization is recognized, often uncritically and possibly mistakenly, as deliberate divine Revelation. An alternative philosophical understanding is possible, however. Perfected human self-realization is not the product of *divine* Revelation, but the choice of *human* revelation, (i.e., the choice of human self-disclosure). Christian culture provides an opportunity and the means for the "new man," to appear in the sense of St. Paul's understanding that the "new man" is the result of human agency in the presence of God.⁵⁵ In the dynamic process of fashioning a Christian culture what is revelatory, in the sense of personal discovery, is the notion of human agency. In other words, it is not that fallen humanity knows itself to have been made in the image of a perfect God, but that imperfect humanity knows that God has been made in the image of perfected humanity. However, this image of perfected humanity i. e., God, appears as but an actor within the cosmos, among many other actors, intertwined within the activity of mortal humanity. It is not inconceivable, then, to expect that a philosophy, or theology, of religious posthumanism or transhumanism arising out of the imagination of science fiction enthusiasts, will need an alternative philosophy for the interpretation of Christian culture and God in a future posthumanity. Antecedent to this task of fashioning a philosophy of Christian culture appropriate to posthuman interpretation is the philosophy of ancient Greece. The post-mythological Hellenists, i. e., the ancient philosophers, sought an alternative perspective for the advanced

⁵⁵ Cf. Ephesians 4:22-24.

understanding of their experience of the gods of the cosmos. So, why shouldn't we?

In theory, human beings lacking religious cultural values (or their secular equivalent) in the broadest sense would be, in fact, non-existent. They would be but brute animals. That is to say, such beings would be unrecognizable as human beings. In the case of God, however, (who is not *a* being) the lack of religious cultural values and qualities is a necessity for Western Christian philosophical understanding. That is to say that God cannot be bound by culture. God must remain unrecognizable, unknowable and effectively non-existent to be God. A directly knowable God would not be God in any of the three monotheistic religions. This philosophical insight has roots as far back as the query of Moses in the presence of the burning bush: "But if they [the Israelites] ask me what his name is, what am I to tell them?"⁵⁶ Phenomenological philosophers interpret the answer to this query (arising from an archaic form of the Hebrew verb "to be") as disclosing that God ultimately evolves as a useful and fashionable fiction, or phenomenal notion. Thus, it is philosophically legitimate to recognize that God need not continue to be present as a separate and independent entity as was the case among the ancient Hebrews. In short, in contemporary Western phenomenology God can be conceived as the perfected product of consciousness realized, that is, made real, through the exercise of human imagination.

In St. Paul's day, Greek devotees of the Areopagus recognized the presence of an unknown god in their midst and allowed for its worship as part of religious culture.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Exodus 3: 13-15 (Jerusalem Bible text).

⁵⁷ Acts 17:22-24 "The pagans used to dedicate altars 'to the unknown gods' lest they provoke the vengeance of gods whose names they did not know. Paul turns the practice to his own purpose and thus parries

The concept of the *unknowability of God* is a belief evident in both Mosaic Hebraism and Hellenic metaphysics which means that the mind of humanity is limited and cannot comprehend any knowledge of God. The unknowability of God is more accurately a statement of the positive experience of the limitations of the human mind, and not a statement of the characteristics of God as many modern-day Christians continue to believe. I suggest that the phenomenological notion of God as a fashionable fiction represents an advanced epistemological stage in the evolution of the intellect to overcome its limitations. As human linguistics, ideas and notions of God continue to evolve, the goal is ultimately the *knowability* of God in Teilhard de Chardin's sense of an Omega Point. In short, humans have the inherent ability to enhance the capacity of their minds through directing evolution. Thus, in phenomenological philosophy, unlike in classical philosophy, philosophers recognize that the fictional notion of God is subject to evolution, perhaps to the Omega Point of reality.

Christian culture may be recognized as a physical reality once present in the world, or currently present in the world. Or, Christian culture may be envisioned to represent the theoretical and metaphysical notion of a future world. The former past and present cultures exist as the sinful Church militant and evolving towards perfection in this world. Whereas the latter, may be conceived as the sinful Church, yet to be realized as the Kingdom of God to be established on this earth. Or, as the classical philosophers believed, to be realized in a future redeemed life beyond this world. Concerning the sinful Church militant evolving towards perfection in this life, Alfred Loisy's comment in *The*

the charge of preaching 'outlandish gods.'" (Jerusalem Bible text, note 'o').

Gospel and the Church ⁵⁸ is instructive here. "Jésus annonçait le Royaume et c'est l'Église qui est venue." That is, "Jesus preached the Kingdom of God and it was the Church that came." Phenomenological notions are true to social fact, (since they arise out of experience) whereas, an idea of the imagination may or may not be true to social fact (since it arises out of the intellect). Given that the projection process mentioned above is true to social fact (i.e., the Christian culture arises from the notion of a perfected humanity projected into an idealized future) then, to doubt Christian culture, as disclosing the Church, is to doubt one's personal social fact as being true to Christian existence. But to doubt one's own existence is illogical. That is to say a positive cannot arise out of a negative. And without a Christian existence a Christian culture cannot be fashioned. When that is the case, an individual often becomes an atheist in respect to the past and present, but not necessarily an antitheist with respect to the present and the future. The old adage continues to prove true in the contemporary cultural matrix: "When old gods die, new ones are invented." That is to say, when old traditional Christian cultures die, new contemporary secular cultures are often born, but with an unrecognized, or if recognized, an unacknowledged religious purpose inherited from the former. ⁵⁹ Otherwise, cultures would not reflect human specificity. Thus, new philosophies and new creeds of secular life are fashioned with vestiges of previous

⁵⁸ Original French title, *L'Évangile et l'Église* (Paris: Picard 1902).

⁵⁹ Following the mind of Albert Keller, I suggest that the distinction he makes between secularism and secularization is philosophically correct. He argues that "the secularization in question is to be clearly distinguished from a secularism which is an atheistic ideology, offering an answer without recourse to God when asked about the meaning of the whole, the purpose of life." s. v. 'The Christian View of Secularization' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:1560 (ed. Karl Rahner).

religious (Christian) roots. This observation should be readily evident to both classical and phenomenological philosophers.

All religious culture is coterminous with humanity. There is no antithesis between religious culture and humanity. That is to say, from a phenomenological perspective, there is no antecedent stage of human culture before it becomes religious culture. Religious culture is, in fact, recognized simultaneously as being secular culture by anthropological philosophers. Religious culture and secular culture are distinguishable, but not separable, in the study of human belief systems. They constitute one, not two realities. Both cultural perspectives have the same existential goals, i.e., to eradicate anxiety, to affirm personal death, and to establish hope in a future personal well-being, temporally and spiritually (psychologically). I maintain the view that non-human animals are not aware of their own deaths, nor are they self-consciously preoccupied with their own future, therefore, neither of these issues is a cause for claiming an equivalent to *human* anxiety in their experience. Their anxiety, when evident, is due to other causes.

Further, whether in religious or secular cultures humans distinguish between "me" and "not-me;" between subjects as persons and objects as things (or other persons) to which conscious humans assign values. For there to be personal specified self-disclosure in a Christian culture there must be a notion of *that of God* in humanity, or alternatively *that of humanity* attributed to God, literally or metaphorically. According to some philosophers, Christian culture embodies an enhanced collective and individual self-disclosure of a personal moral conscience of the faithful as a product of their experience. In short, Christian culture reveals the notion of a societal law in human behaviour, or better, Christian culture discloses behaviour which

demonstrates a self-imposed moral obligation on the part of the Christian individual living in community. Christian culture, then, as an existential phenomenon, manifests the notion of a perfected humanity (i. e., God-like humanity) specifically as a Christian value. Christian culture does not disclose humanity in any other sense.

Given the apparent innate desire for salvation from sin, which the brute does not seem to exhibit, some philosophers traditionally and consciously assign the exclusivity of Christian culture as a necessity for human salvation. In an alternative philosophical understanding, which I favour, the notion of a perfected humanity is not fully realized in the transcendental sense of a heavenly existence in another world. Perfected humanity is realized only partially in the transcendent spiritual life experienced in this world. From a phenomenological Christian perspective, perfected humanity may be conceived as humanity which lives its ultimate goal, i.e., the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Righteousness, to the best of its ability in this world. It is as if perfected humanity reflects upon itself consciously and fashions an appropriate culture to meet its spiritual needs. For this alternative view to be realized and renew the face of the earth, it must be understood existentially, not merely metaphysically.

Within the inherited philosophical perspective of the West, the faithful living in a Christian culture conceive themselves to be agents of their own destiny, yet simultaneously being subject to direction from an external agent perceived as governing the affairs of the cosmos. To the minds of many the ancient adage holds true: "man proposes; God disposes." However, perceived existentially this is accurate only to a degree. Strictly speaking, in being subject to an external agent, the faithful are reduced to actors. That is, beings that operate under direction. In short,

they are subject to the will of God. In the contemporary alternative view that I suggest here humans, as agents, possess an existential independence. They are not subject to a fate of any description (including the divine will) and that permits the unique fashioning of particular societies based on their cultural experience.

The existential fashioning of particular societies within a culture often requires a re-assessment of historical and philosophical interpretation of the New Testament as Ignatius F. Horstmann (1840-1908) has shown.⁶⁰ Concerning the contemporary understanding of God, an existential re-assessment of the classical interpretation of God is required. That is, the God of the three traditionally monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam which is held by the faithful to be revealed as an agent requires an existential re-assessment. Humans, as agents, do not passively receive predetermined ideas infused by God into their intellect. Thus, in fashioning their particular societies, Christians, as well as others, mistakenly continue

⁶⁰ "The New Testament bears on its face the evidence that it was addressed to men who already believed and were already instructed – partially at least – in the truths it teaches or enforces, and that it was not written to teach the faith to such as had no knowledge of it, but to correct errors, to present more fully the faith on certain points. No one can read it without perceiving that it neither is, nor professes to be, the original medium of the Christian revelation, but from first to last supposes a revelation previously made, the true religion to have been already taught and instructions in it already received. From these facts it follows that a knowledge of the inspired writings is not necessary to salvation, and furthermore that the Church approves herself to men as a Divine authority, independently of the Holy Scriptures." Quoted from 'The History of the Holy Catholic Bible' in *The Holy Bible*, Henry Bill Publishing, Norwich, Connecticut (1875:7). Ignatius Horstmann was the third bishop of Cleveland. He also taught philosophy, German and Hebrew at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia.

to make God a supreme agent within their cultures. Conceived alternatively, that is through phenomenological philosophy, God is but an actor in Christian culture. Actors merely operate or react and cannot be agents. Only other agents can respond. Actors react passively to an agent's initiative. While it is the case that agents act in light of their own specific initiative and independence. Even so, actors (even fictitious actors) are able to affectively (passively) influence an agent. Christian and secular agents have an ethical responsibility in that they are able to effectively manipulate actors, as well as other agents.

Those faithful who believe in Christian melioration,⁶¹ i.e., moral optimism, act as agents in the Christian culture that they fashion within the Western theological and philosophical tradition. In a Hebrew, Christian or Islamic culture interpreted phenomenologically, God cannot appear directly as an agent or its moral equivalent. In other words, God is understood only as an affective presence to humans who have conceived it to be so. That God is really and truly the agent of creation (as in classical Christian theology) is considered as unnecessary intellectual speculation within phenomenological philosophy. Since the origin of creation cannot be "made to appear," through any philosophical exercise within the matrix of human experience. Phenomenologists experience the physical phenomena of creation, but God, as creator of the world, cannot be experienced as a physical phenomenon, but only as the fictitious product of human logical activity, i.e., the intellect. However, the classical/Hellenistic view still holds

⁶¹ This term, melioration, was coined by George Eliot and advances "the view that world is neither completely evil nor completely good, but that the relative amounts of good and evil are changeable, [and] that good is capable of increase." s. v. 'Meliorism,' *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient-Medieval-Modern*, Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1963 (D. D. Runes, ed.)

credibility and remains dominant within contemporary Christian culture alongside an increasingly expanding phenomenological (existential) philosophical perspective.

When contemporary humans study religion, they are studying themselves philosophically, psychologically and sociologically. These studies may be formal, as in a recognized school of such disciplines, or informal, as expressed in the uncritical observations of the masses. In Christian culture, as classically inherited, Revelation is the the opposite of study, formal or informal, in that answers are given beforehand by God to questions inquirers ask. To some philosophers in Christian culture, God is understood as communicating information through Revelation to humanity to tell them who they are. I suggest that Revelation in this sense has been misunderstood, but without malicious intent, to establish God's role as an agent in the cultures of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. A revelatory God, as a philosophical agent, appears in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic matrix only after human consciousness has recognized God as one "not-me" among others. Following upon this recognition, God is assigned by Christian consciousness a subjective phenomenological status, i.e., a notion, fashioned through intellectual activity and, therefore, is not a physical reality. This philosophical perspective to establish God's role as an agent is historically evident upon an examination of the Judeo-Christian cultures in the West as well as in Islam.

Contemporary theology, of the non-Hellenic sort, as the interpreter of Revelation is an intellectual combination of philosophy, psychology, anthropology and pathology generated by human thinking. Correctly interpreted they collectively disclose new insight regarding the term Revelation. (The new insight being that God's self-revealing knowledge transforms into humanity's self-

disclosing consciousness.) All four disciplines have as their common object the study of the ethical behaviour of human beings. Within the matrix formed by these four disciplines, most classical theologians accept *that* God created the world, but the practical or existential praxis of *how* God created the world remains unknown. Thus, it is left to these classical theologians to suggest an answer based upon their deliberations. The practical "how question," as a philosophical issue, came into being during the age of scientific inquiry in which modern science appeared as a fifth discipline. However, the "how question," which remains unanswered within Revelation, also remains unanswered within phenomenology, since the manner of original creation cannot be observed by human consciousness. Thus, both speculative philosophers and phenomenologists must leave the so-called "how question" unanswered. The matter continues to be a theological mystery, rather than a philosophical puzzle.

Christian cultures arise in a particular manner. They are particular phenomena which have historical antecedents which are part of the general cultural evolutionary process. That is to say that there was a time when Christian cultures did not exist. Christian cultures came into existence by theologically "baptizing" the antecedent cultures evident within an existential matrix. That is to say that there is no such thing as an ideal Christian culture whose appearance is not constructed upon pre-existing experience. The classical adage has a phenomenological parallel: "grace [the desire for human perfection] builds upon nature." From a phenomenological perspective, then, there is an element of secular culture in all Christian cultures arising out of the experiences of the faithful.⁶² Further, a Christian

⁶² Therefore, to my mind Catholic philosophers and theologians justifiably undertake further investigation into this element of human

culture appears as a unity rather than as a union in phenomenological interpretation. Perhaps a modern political illustration will assist here. A political *union* tolerates no divisive dissenting relations within a willed community, i.e., contrary to appearances the union's political *essence* is not divided, thus demonstrating a static political idea. A political *unity*, to the contrary, permits differentiating and dissenting relations within the willed community, thus demonstrating a dynamic political notion. The United States of America considers itself a political union, since philosophically and theoretically it tolerates no un-American activity which might threaten its static, but expandable, existence. Should expansion by "add-ons" cease Americanism is in danger of fossilization. The European Union, on the other hand, is a misnomer. It is, in fact, a philosophical and existential unity of European States that not merely tolerates, but incorporates existential differences and diversification within its dynamic political constitution. Thus, European Unity constitutes a sustainable evolutionary development by its member States. Further, there is no political, or philosophical notion of un-European activities within the European Unity of States to threaten European existence.

To conclude this section, then, some philosophical prescriptions are required of all Christian culture. Christian culture is an ideological concept positing God's reality in

perfection within a contemporary understanding of *laïcité*, as it continues to evolve from the understanding of "laicism." Ernst Niemann has noted, further to Pius XI's encyclical *Quas primus* (1925) which brought the term 'laicism' into ecclesiastical vocabulary, that in the course of "the declaration of the French episcopate in 1945, ... the term 'laicity' was coined, as a counterpart to 'laicism.'" s. v. 'Secularization: II. Laicism' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:1563 (ed. Karl Rahner).

human affairs (the classical perspective). It is also a notional concept arising from human consciousness, in which God’s presence is an imaginary fiction of perfected humanity affecting worldly affairs and is worthy of worship (the phenomenological perspective). Christian culture, and religious culture generally, was inconceivable until the advent of the modern scientific age. Prior to the legitimization of atheism, or irreligious belief, political and philosophical proponents of a Christian culture felt compelled to “Christianize” all religious cultures, one way or another. On the threshold of an emerging philosophical and techno-digital posthumanity, such imperial missionary endeavours seem to be on the wane.

However, it seems to me that Christian culture does not require a strictly new interpretation and understanding. It does not require a revolution, but requires an evolution. A *ressourcement* for the *raison d’être* of Christian culture needs to be undertaken. Mere importation of classical philosophical humanism into a philosophical posthumanity will not be sustainable. Serious philosophical criticism of global experience, which is not likely to become the task of the faithful constituting the masses, is required to direct the human evolutionary progress. Given the need for such serious philosophical criticism, below I briefly outline the current stage of my philosophical perspective on Christian culture in light of purpose-driven evolution.

A Personal Philosophical Assessment of Christian Culture

My personal philosophical assessment of Christian culture focuses primarily on the assigned value of religious culture by and for individuals and secondarily on the assigned

value of religious culture by and for the community.⁶³ The individual values of religious cultures are indicative of the transcendental and transcendent desires of the human beings. Phenomenological philosophy arises out of the human existential condition, whereas, *scholastic* theology arises out of intellectual speculation on metaphysics.⁶⁴ How transcendent values can be satisfied in this world is the task of phenomenological philosophy. Thus, my philosophical interpretation does not fall within the historical understanding of classical Hellenic philosophy. Nor do I necessarily accept all the conclusions of the interpreters of Hegelian philosophy, as influential as they are. My assessment is not intended to divinize the natural order, even after it has entered its Anthropocene evolutionary age. I do suggest, however, that in the phenomenological perspective philosophy and theology ultimately serve the same purpose. That is, they both make phenomena appear real before the human mind.

Both disclose their object of study, i.e., Christian culture, as ultimately concerned with the relationship of the human and the divine. The distinction between them is academic, not essential, and expressed relationally. Phenomenological

⁶³ Recall my comment above (pg. 29). “By assigned value I mean *worth* or *goodness*, as a subjective notion, or an objective ideal, that humans attribute to observable phenomena.” I define *worth* as the measure of something by its desirable qualities or by the esteem in which it is held.

⁶⁴ *Pastoral* theology, as identified generally by the Fathers of Vatican II, is the exception. It arises out of the experience of the faithful. Further, Heinz Shuster concludes that pastoral theology is existential theology since theologians engage “with the Church as a reality with a social and historical structure” and they employ empirical data in “the planning of the Church’s action for the present and the future.” s. v. ‘Pastoral Theology’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:1179/1181 (ed. Karl Rahner).

philosophy is not ranked either lower or higher than pastoral or dogmatic theology and vice versa. Their relationship is not a hierarchical one, but a nodal, or relational one. Historically, all theology is but an intellectual interpretation of divinity within religious belief. Thus, theology is conceived independently as a particular branch of philosophy. However, Vergilius Ferm has noted that "theology need not have any *necessary* reference to religion; it may be a purely theoretical discussion about God and God's relation to the world on a *disinterested* plane of free inquiry."⁶⁵

Within my philosophical assessment, the past and the present do not set the limits on the future. The past has been determined by human agents, the present is being determined by human agents, and the future is yet to be determined by human agents. Speculation notwithstanding, it remains unknown as to what the future will be. (To say, "it is unknown as to what the future will *bring*," is but metaphor.) To my way of thinking contemporary cultural experience can be a means for human agents to re-live past experiences, as it were, in the present by recalling the memories of previous experiences. In short, the past, as memory, may be imported into present experience.

I am a positivist in my philosophy in the sense of being opposed to transcendental or transcendent metaphysics as directly revealing an independent existential reality. Transcendental metaphysics is not proper to this world, but is a mental projection from this world. Transcendental metaphysics is truly that which is extraterrestrial. However, a transcendent metaphysics, concerned with quality and

⁶⁵ [My italics] s. v. 'Theology' in *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient-Medieval-Modern*, Littlefield, Adams & Co. (ed. D. D. Runes, 1963).

value, is proper to this world and discloses a terrestrial aspect of being human. Thus, historically Christian culture may be experienced as transcendentally or transcendently reflecting the concepts of human knowledge and wisdom. Christian culture, then, being existentially experienced through the senses is actively assigned a meaning through human agents via their intellect. Thus, Christian culture itself may be interpreted through phenomenological philosophy disclosing it as a unique societal fact (value) fashioned through the intellectual effort of the faithful; as well as conceiving it as a matrix for the formation of the classical human being characterized by a distinctive moral formation. As an existential phenomenon, or reality, Christian culture has no independent status outside itself, nor any inherent purpose contained within itself. The status and purpose of Christian culture are assigned to reflect an anthropological understanding of God, conceived as perfected humanity and disclosed in this world. In short, anthropological self-understanding as the reverse of Revelation is philosophically true. That is, the notion of God arises in this world through human consciousness and intellectual effort (i.e., God, or gods, are assigned an immanence in this world from humanity's own experience). Anthropologically understood then, Christian culture is the locus of God as an actor in human affairs, but not as an agent. Phenomenologically, humans are the only agents in anthropological affairs.

Understood as self-knowledge, human consciousness is coextensive with the individual mind. The evolution of human consciousness, like that of physical humanity, is a process that can never move backwards but only forwards. Within the Western philosophical perspective, this forward movement from physical being to metaphysical being may have given rise to the idea of immortality. Metaphysics is a logical theory of being that originated with the ancient

Greek philosophers. Metaphysical knowledge does not reveal any external cause for its being. The cause of metaphysical knowledge is rooted in the interpretation of human experience. Ordinarily, a human being knows itself as uniquely other than the objects of which it is conscious. And subsequently contemplating these unique objects humans recognize themselves as specifically different from the other objects in the cosmos.

The human self is, in fact, individuated by what it contemplates recognizing it to be not-of-itself, but of another, which is sometimes similar to itself. In like manner, a culture with Christian worth and value has been individuated from, but is not isolated from, other human cultures that share similarities characteristic of human worth and value. Thus, every critical advancement in the self-knowledge of the faithful in Christian culture provides a potential advancement, if only partially, in the self-knowledge of the constituents of any other culture.

Understood as a negative activity, much of contemporary Western culture denies God *in practice* by showing interest exclusively in techno-digital science. Yet, such apparent denial often does not reject God *in theory* but retains some speculative interest in God conceived metaphysically, living in heaven, as it were. Philosophically, I reject the dichotomy between earth and heaven as postulated by classical philosophy since this concept is an artificial intellectual attempt designed to address the perceived human need to be free from anxiety and doubt in this life. The expectation is that living conditions will be better in the next life than in this one according to the classical perspective. The presumption here is that an agent, superior to all human beings, will have redeemed humans from the threats of danger, anxiety and doubt to live in a future transcendental perfect world. Rather, I subscribe to an

alternative philosophical view. The existential need to be free from danger, anxiety and doubt can be successfully addressed through positive constructive efforts of an increasingly humane humanity. An increasingly humane humanity will direct its own evolution as it fashions worthwhile and positive religious goals and values from its experience. I concur with Leslie Dewart's perspective on Karl Marx's philosophy that led to various anti-theistic "Marxisms." Marx's philosophy was an abortive attempt at fashioning a more humane humanity "beginning with a disbelief in God."⁶⁶ Some contemporary philosophers, who are mostly atheists, conceive of a non-religious humanity. I do not subscribe to this theory. Human beings are existentially religious, not merely theoretically so, as the history of religious philosophy illustrates.⁶⁷

The purpose of my assessment in this brief book is to critique Christian culture and philosophy, not to destroy them. I critique the philosophical construction of scholasticism in light of the phenomenological philosophy introduced by Husserl and Heidegger. It is a truism that the more accurately religious culture is comprehended, as to its original intentions, minus the popular accretions of history and spurious interpretations, the more authentically the motives of its original devotees are interpreted. (Recall the significance of Alfred Loisy's observation.) Further, a contemporary religious culture that arises out of experience is more likely to satisfy its adherents than one that is determined by theoretical dogmatics alone.

As a phenomenological philosopher I affirm that relationships, which are intangibles, are proper objects of

⁶⁶ *The Foundations of Belief* Herder and Herder (1969:347).

⁶⁷ s. v. "Religion, Philosophy of:" *Dictionary of Philosophy: Ancient-Medieval-Modern*, Littlefield, Adams & Co. 1963 (D. D. Runes, ed).

human consciousness and that these relationships connect reality, that is, relationships constitute a phenomenological ontology since they make reality (being) appear.⁶⁸ Christian culture, according to phenomenological philosophers, is a form of notional being proper to the consciousness of human individuals. Christian cultures disclose to the human mind particular and unique religious values which are not inherent in the ordinary experience of the values of non-Christian religious cultures around the globe. Yet, in admitting this social fact, "the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions."⁶⁹ The disclosures contained in Christian cultures appear mostly in two modes: in scripture, the sacred texts of the prophets and evangelists, and in the customary societal practice of values known as Christian tradition. The former being subject to re-interpretation and the latter being subject to re-formation. Recall I. F. Horstmann's insight concerning scriptural interpretation. "Historically, it is certain that in point of time the Church precedes the Scriptures. She was in existence, established and perfect, possessing full and complete authority, before there was any question of the Scriptures."⁷⁰

Contemporary historical studies show that most Christian believers are not conscious that most of the elements that

⁶⁸ In Leslie Dewart's words: "Phenomenological ontologies agree with metaphysics that there can be no reality other than being, that anything to which man can relate himself is being, and, in a word, that reality can be identified *with* being because it can be identified *as* being" [Dewart's italics]. *The Foundations of Belief* Herder and Herder (1969:350).

⁶⁹ cf. 'The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,' paragraph 2 (*Nostra Aetate*) in *Vatican Council II*, (Flannery, 1996) Dominican Publications & Costello Publishing.

⁷⁰ 'The History of the Holy Catholic Bible' in *The Holy Bible*, Henry Bill Publishing, Norwich, Connecticut (1875:6).

make up their religion are not divine values, but solely human values assigned, or better “baptized” into a divine status. These values which are (mistakenly) conceived of as eternally divine by the faithful, in fact, reflect the contingent status of human consciousness. Such values may then be added or subtracted as existential conditions require. Further, it seems to me that, should there be a discovery of non-human life on other planets or in other galaxies there is no existential reason to suppose that such life would have generated gods appropriate to its needs. Phenomenological philosophy and the contemporary notion of Christian culture both arise out of the interpretation of empirical sense data. Phenomenological philosophy and contemporary interpretation of Christian culture are modern intellectual societal constructs by human beings to account for their various and particular experiences of existence.

Thus, it is clear that philosophy and Christian culture evolve. As each one progresses to a critical interpretation each becomes a means to enlighten humanity. In concluding this section, I note a poetic insight by a significant figure of 18th century aesthetic and moral philosophy, Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Pope’s Roman Catholic faith obtained for him the friendship of some wealthy English families of the time. “But his religion also precluded him from a formal course of education, since Catholics were not admitted to the universities. He was trained at home by Catholic priests for a short time and attended Catholic schools at Twyford, near Winchester, and at Hyde Park Corner, London, but he was mainly self-educated.”⁷¹ I mention this because my rationale for writing this book from the perspective of a “new to you” view within phenomenological philosophy is based on the

⁷¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Internet Edition) s. v. Alexander Pope [accessed 18 December, 2021].

introductory phrase in Pope’s, *An Essay on Man: Epistle II*. “Know, then, thyself, presume not God to scan; The proper study of mankind is Man.” An endnote in Mark Pattison’s edition of *Essay on Man* ⁷² reinforces the significance of Pope’s quote to this essay. It reads: “This is the oldest dictum of logic or philosophy on record, and was thought so highly of that it was even attributed to the oracle of Apollo. Its original purport was to direct curiosity away from the phenomena of the universe — light, heat, winds, earthquakes, the succession of the seasons, day and night, &c. — as inscrutable, towards life and human affairs. The contrast intended by Pope is between the futility of metaphysical speculation on the attributes of the Deity, and the more profitable employment of the study of man.”

⁷² Published by The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1881. [Accessed via *The Internet Archive*, 18 December, 2021].

*LAÏCITÉ*⁷³

Laïcité: A Phenomenological Perspective

Note: I consider *laïcité* to be a modern phenomenological notion that is generally influencing Christian culture worldwide. *Laïcité*, as an evolving assigned value, appears to be somewhat poorly understood within Anglo-Saxon cultures. Hence, I include a brief reflection on *laïcité* as expressed in its worth and value in contemporary French Republican philosophy and polity.

This monograph is a presentation of my understanding of the phenomenon of *laïcité* as it stands in 2021. (Both *laïcité* and my understanding of it will most likely continue to evolve.) Throughout this section, I employ the French term because, to date, I have not found an English equivalent that adequately reflects the various nuances the French collective mind on the matter. However, the English term *secularity*, understood as a positive concept, comes the closest within my present perspective. To my way of

⁷³ Some Catholic readers may be familiar with Giuseppe Alberigo’s understanding of the term as outlined in “Facteurs de laïcité au Concile Vatican II” in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, tome 74, fas. 2, 2000, in which he writes in a footnote: “Ce mot est utilisé dans le sens du processus de ‘décléricalisation’ à l’intérieur de l’Église et non pas pour indiquer une orientation pour l’autonomie de l’État vis-à-vis de l’Église.” {Translation: This word is used in the sense of meaning the process of ‘declericalization’ within the Church and not to indicate an understanding of the autonomy of the State vis-à-vis the Church.} My approach is the opposite. I accept the term in a positive sense as used in the current political discussions indicating the phenomenon of the separation of Church and State. *Laïcité*, advocated by the Council, indicated a different understanding than the one indicated by modern political usage. The Council, according to Alberigo, recognized *laïcité* as indicating one element in the Church’s internal *aggiornamento* with respect to the participation of the laity within ecclesial governance. The term evolved from “laicism” as introduced by Pope Pius XI in the encyclical *Quas primus* (1925).

thinking, Albert Keller gives a very satisfactory description which the phenomenological philosopher can contemplate. He suggests that secularity may be understood as the whole of human life ceasing “to be determined by religion. The result, secularity, then means independence and adulthood with regard to religion.”⁷⁴ Further, *laïcité*, the modern phenomenon, cannot be adequately understood without being aware, to some degree, of the religious history between the *ancient régime* and the Republic of France.

Laïcité, or secularity, as a phenomenon arose within the Church which preceded it. Thus, *laïcité* cannot be understood without a critical appreciation of the historical evolution of “Church and State” to that of “Religion and World,” as introduced by Vatican II.⁷⁵ The former embodies the the relative political autonomy of the State vis-à-vis the Church, whereas the latter is conscious of the humanitarian authority of religion in the world. “Church and State” is a primarily political matter, whereas “Church and World” is primarily an ethical matter. The concept of philosophical contemplation has thus shifted from politics to morality in which *laïcité* has its roots. *Laïcité*, as a moral phenomenon, cannot be examined to see what it is “in itself” without reference to the matrix of human life. Like all moral phenomena *laïcité* needs a concrete appearance to establish its reality, just as justice needs the actions of a concrete person to establish its reality.

Within phenomenological philosophy, *laïcité*, or secularity, is recognized as reconciling individual freedoms (which are subjective) with the collective values of a republic (which

⁷⁴ s. v. ‘Secularization’ in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns and Oates, 1975:1554 (ed. Karl Rahner).

⁷⁵ Contemporary secularity, as a positive concept from an ecclesial perspective, is evident throughout the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

are objective). It is easy to comprehend that *laïcité* could have arisen politically only within a Christian monarchy. It is the outcome of the rejection of the Western concept of the Divine Right of Kings. The Divine Right of Kings asserted that the monarch was subject to no earthly authority, but derived the right to rule directly from the will of God, and thus was not subject to the will of the masses, or the aristocracy, or any other estate of the realm, including the church. Interpreted strictly, the Divine Right of Kings implied that any attempt to depose the monarchy, or restrict its powers was contrary to the will of God and could constitute treason. Thus, *laïcité* as presently understood, cannot be incorporated into a monarchical or ecclesiastical system of religious governance since it rejects any and all religious aspects in determining human behaviour. *Laïcité* is truly a republican concept that allows religious observation and governance only a celebratory existence, originating in and tolerated by, the will of the citizenry. Celebratory existence implies no recourse to civic support whatsoever.

Laïcité is, at present, applicable only to public officials who authoritatively represent the State (an objective norm) and who are in direct contact with the public. A Nation (a subjective norm) is free to be religious, or irreligious, unless it undermines cohesion and harmony within the State. Hence *laïcité*, as a form of governance, does not apply to Nations, only States. Further, *laïcité* in the State and *laïcité* in "the world" are two different phenomenological realities. *Laïcité*, as applicable to the world, means that philosophers choose to abandon the Hellenic idea of a religious universe such as Thales, a pre-Socratic philosopher (circa 585 B.C.) held, and attend to the world as a particular locus and matrix solely of human

activity.⁷⁶ The recognition of the non-religious universe is held by many contemporary philosophers to be a positive evolutionary development in which humanity takes its rightful existential place. But, in the sense of rejecting or deleting a religious universe, and subsequently a religious State, from conscious awareness *laïcité* is considered by many contemporary philosophers and politicians to be a negative concept. As a phenomenon of post-World War II secularization, *laïcité* is interpreted as a positive notion appropriate to the evolutionary maturing of humanity as a religious species. As Albert Keller observed concerning secularism and secularization: "The true relationship between the Christian notion of God and a divinized world is precisely the opposite: 'to Christianize the world means to secularize it.'" ⁷⁷

As I see it, *laïcité*, being a modern notion, may be interpreted as a contemporary *political* theology historically arising out of a pastoral theology that came to formal religious consciousness with the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. As political theology one might say that *laïcité* is the solution that contemporary Europe has proposed in order not to repeat the past and to escape an endemic religious and civil conflict. Originating within Christianity *laïcité* is crafted to prevent civil strife over religious influence. *Laïcité* belongs to a theology that continues to move from classical *Sacerdotium* and *Imperium* to an unencumbered democratic freedom of the Church vis-à-vis the State. As a Christian political theology

⁷⁶ Dewart's clarification is instructive. The idea of Thales that "all things are full of gods" ... meant that "the divinities are not actually found in peculiar or sacred places or times, as mythology. ... The divinities lie immediately before us, in things themselves." Leslie Dewart (1969:54) *The Foundations of Belief* Herder and Herder.

⁷⁷ s. v. 'Secularization' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. Karl Rahner) Burns and Oates (1975:1559).

laïcité is a doctrine of the independence and adulthood of the faithful citizenry in the presence of God. As a pastoral theology *laïcité* is to be understood as a phenomenological ecclesial movement to authentic secularity within the world, not to secularism which is its false counterpart. As the result of its historical evolution, Albert Keller has noted that secularity "is now understood as a more or less neutral term, while secularism is taken to be a false ideology."⁷⁸ *Laïcité*, as authentic neutral secularity, only claims jurisdiction over those who in governance authoritatively enact public policy, formally, informally or casually. *Laïcité* applies to: 1) public officials, employees and volunteers who are in direct contact with the public, 2) professionals who intervene in the public space, 3) professionals who have a relationship of service to the population and elected officials. It makes no claim for jurisdiction over the religious convictions, or lack of religious convictions, of the citizenry in the public square.

Laïcité, was initially conceived as a negative concept. The negative perspective began within the earlier principle of the separation of Church and State in France that eventually evolved into their reciprocal independence becoming enshrined in law on December 9, 1905. France, as a political entity, (i.e., the State) then considered herself as an indivisible, secular, democratic and a social Republic (article 1 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic). Yet, as an ethnic identity, or Nation, France also considered herself as a voluntary religious cultural entity existing independently of the new Republic. The philosophical question of *laïcité*, as a question of religion and secularity both within and without France, has been studied regularly since the end of the 1980s. In French society, as within

⁷⁸ s. v. 'Secularization' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. Karl Rahner) Burns and Oates (1975:1554).

global society, each notion remains a controversial subject that is often mistakenly understood or misinterpreted.

Thus, many questions arise for public officials in particular and the country’s citizens in general on what is allowed or not allowed by the principle of fundamental freedoms in religion, allowed or not allowed in respect of public order, and allowed or not allowed in the neutrality of the different social spaces. With absolute respect for the freedom of conscience *laïcité* is the guarantor of a French-style of society, a particular notion of living together, where some form of religious belief is not presumed necessary. This concept, recognized by the European Court of Human Rights, appears to be gaining recognition universally as it reconciles personal freedom and societal unity.

A particular republican value in contemporary France.

In France, *laïcité* guarantees freedom of conscience. From this derives the freedom to practice celebratory beliefs or convictions respecting the lawful conditions of public order. *Laïcité* implies the neutrality of the State and recognizes the equality of all before the law without favouring, or supporting, any religion or belief system. *Laïcité* guarantees believers and non-believers the same right to freedom, 1) of expression of individual beliefs or convictions, 2) or to freedom of an individual’s absence of expression. The “absence of expression” describes the non-practising Catholic or non-observant Jew, etc. It ensures the right for an individual to be religious, to be an atheist, but not an anti-theist, to be agnostic, and to convert from one religion to another. It guarantees the free exercise of religious public worship. With respect to the freedom of religion *laïcité* means that no one can be forced by the State to embrace theological dogmas or religious doctrines. In other words, *laïcité* repudiates the Constantinian concept of

the political (temporal) power intervening in religious affairs. *Laïcité* thus recognizes the political order as founded solely on the sovereignty of the people as the citizens of the State. The sole sovereignty of the citizens of the State legislates the equality of all before the administration of the Public Service. That is to say that the sovereignty of the people is not determined by divine right.

Laïcité is not one philosophical opinion among others, but rather, it is the freedom to have a philosophical opinion of one's own without religious interference. It is not only a philosophical conviction subject to cultural contingency, but an objective (legal) principle which permits all religious opinions that are not opposed to public harmony and order. Thus, contemporary *laïcité* is the “glue” of a united France, as understood by the current Prime Minister, Mr. Jean Castex. However, it is not a view shared by all the politicians in France. *Laïcité* being a living principle, must adapt in order to retain all its original strength.

Recently, as part of the bill consolidating the principles of the Republic, President Macron has called for the parliamentarians, those representing the Nation, to engage in debates on the changes proposed in the understanding of *laïcité*. In 2021 the Government moved further to protect the balances enshrined in the French model of *laïcité* which is arguably unique in the world. Currently, the government is re-enacting the principles of *laïcité* inherited from the 1905 declaration by adapting them to the challenges of France's contemporary society. Upon completion the new declaration will ensure that the principle of *laïcité* is respected and promoted regularly by all those who are its officers. That is to say promoted by all administrations, public services and organizations that are responsible to the government. No spirit contrary to the Republic is to be tolerated in the new re-enactment of *laïcité*. In the new re-

enactment, freedom of worship will be properly re-affirmed in light of the harmony and cohesiveness of the public order in the Republic. Religions will be able to manage their legal and financial responsibilities for optimum benefit of the community. The separation between the Churches and the Republic, however, does not prevent government authorities from consulting ecclesiastical or other religious authorities, and vice versa.

The re-enactment suggests to me a shift in the overall philosophical/political understanding of the 1905 notion of *laïcité*. The French government’s re-enactment will focus on several points of investigation to be overseen by the general secretariat of the Inter-Ministerial Committee, newly created within the Ministry of the Interior. It will also provide up-dated support systems to all those, administrators and public officials, required to implement these measures. Clearly, then, in the mind of the current French government *laïcité* is not a fixed ideological concept immune to evolutionary forces. Rather, French *laïcité* reflects a more dynamic and fluid approach to religion in the modern Republic. It is highly likely that political administrations outside France will follow suit.

§

For the sake of precision of thought, the following French text is a summary of the points made above in English whose expression may not be as precise as the French.

La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l’égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d’origine, de race ou de religion. Elle garantit des droits égaux aux hommes et aux femmes et respecte toutes les croyances. Nul ne doit être inquiété pour ses opinions, même religieuses, pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l’ordre public établi par la

loi. La liberté de religion ou de conviction ne rencontre que des limites nécessaires au respect du pluralisme religieux, à la protection des droits et libertés d'autrui, aux impératifs de l'ordre public et au maintien de la paix civile. La République assure la liberté de conscience et garantit le libre exercice des cultes dans les conditions fixées par la loi du 9 décembre 1905. Au titre de la laïcité, la République ne reconnaît, ne salarie ni ne subventionne aucun culte, ce qui implique qu'aucune religion ou conviction puisse être, ni privilégiée ni discriminée. La laïcité repose sur la séparation des Églises et de l'État, ce qui implique que les religions ne s'immiscent pas dans le fonctionnement des pouvoirs publics et que les pouvoirs publics ne s'ingèrent pas dans le fonctionnement des institutions religieuses. Les élus de la République ont la charge de faire respecter la laïcité. Elle suppose un engagement fort et constant de la puissance publique pour assurer sa pédagogie et sa promotion. La laïcité, parce qu'elle est une des conditions fondamentales du vivre ensemble, requiert une lutte constante contre toutes les discriminations. La puissance publique doit garantir à tous et sur l'ensemble du territoire la possibilité d'accéder à des services publics, où s'impose le respect du principe de neutralité, à côté d'autres services d'intérêt général. Tout agent d'une administration publique, ou du gestionnaire d'un service public a un devoir de stricte neutralité. Il se doit d'adopter un comportement impartial vis à vis des usagers du service public et de ses collègues de travail. Les manquements à ces règles doivent être relevés et peuvent faire l'objet de sanctions. La République laïque garantit l'exercice de tous les droits civils quelles que soient les convictions ou les croyances de chacun. Aucune religion ne peut imposer ses prescriptions à la République. Aucun principe religieux ne peut conduire à ne pas respecter la loi.

The following translation of the Declaration for *Laïcité* is provided by the
Observatoire de la laïcité (Paris, September 22, 2016).

DECLARATION FOR *LAÏCITÉ**

*“*Laïcité*” is usually translated by “secularism”; in view, however, of its particular status in France, as a cardinal principle enshrined in the Constitution, guaranteeing the same rights and duties to believers and non-believers alike, *Laïcité* will be retained in this Declaration.

Laïcité is our common good. It must be promoted and defended. It must unite us, not divide us. In the present times, when there is much questioning and also a tendency to be over-zealous, it is the responsibility of the *Observatoire de la laïcité* to recall what is meant by *Laïcité*, as defined in the Constitution of the Republic and organised by the law of December 9, 1905.

Laïcité is first the freedom of conscience, the freedom to believe or not to believe. The freedom to believe implies the freedom to practice a religion, in private or in public, as long as the manifestation of the practice does not disturb the peace.

In the public interest, there are limits set to the freedom to manifest one’s convictions. To start with, it is forbidden for public servants, and all those who have public service duties, to display their own religious faith: public service must be neutral, so that users are treated equally, regardless of their convictions. In 2004, in order to protect schoolchildren against any form of pressure, the ostensible manifestation of a religion through insignia or dress was banned in all state-run primary and secondary schools. In 2010, for public security reasons, concealing one’s face in public was prohibited (burka, niqab, hoods, helmets, etc.)

It is possible to impose limits, but freedom must remain the basic principle. General prohibition of any outward religious sign in public or in private collective areas would not strengthen *Laïcité*, but would denature it, by turning a freedom into a prohibition.

Laïcité guarantees respect for the principle of equality

Laïcité, which implies the separation between the Churches and the State, guarantees equality among all citizens, regardless of their philosophical or religious convictions. Atheists, agnostics, believers of all creeds enjoy the same rights. The law cannot distinguish among citizens according to their convictions. No religious obligation can be imposed by law. Religions cannot intervene in the affairs of State, and the State must respect the independence of religions.

Stigmatising a religion, imposing restrictions on the religious practices of one particular religion, would be an attack on the Republican principle of Equality, and would be discriminatory.

Laïcité contributes to the republican ideal of fraternity

As the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaims, “*Men are born and remain free and equal in rights*”. And yet they are not all alike. They are free to express their own particular convictions and what they adhere to.

Adhering to the values of the Republic helps to bring citizens together and to accept their differences. *Laïcité* federates and reinforces the unity of the nation. It guards against all that divides or separates. It is a factor of national

union and concord, and thereby contributes to the Republican ideal of Fraternity.

Laïcité must be defended against all those who fight it or deny it. Those who do not respect its rules must be sanctioned.

But a *Laïcité* based on exclusion and prohibition would weaken itself by denying its founding principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

After centuries of religious conflict, *Laïcité*, born of the 1789 Declaration of the rights of man and the citizen, of the legislation secularising education at the end of the 19th century and the law of December 9, 1905, has enabled France today to strike a balance that is a precious asset. We must neither allow it to be brought into question, nor succumb to excessive zeal, even if the difficulties encountered in applying it in a new social and international context call for greater vigilance.

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§

FREEDOMS AND PROHIBITIONS IN THE CONTEXT
OF “*LAÏCITÉ*”

(CONSTITUTIONAL SECULARISM)

[English translation provided by *Observatoire de la Laïcité*]

The last decades have seen the emergence, in a fragile social context, of new phenomena, such as the rise in communitarian demands and the misuse of secularism for the purpose of stigmatisation; the *Observatoire de la Laïcité* has therefore decided to issue a succinct, precise reminder of what *Laïcité* means in terms of freedoms and prohibitions.

1. Prohibitions and limits to individual freedoms in the framework of “*laïcité*.”

The principle of secularism means that the State and religious organisations are separate. There is therefore no state-run public worship. The State neither recognises, nor subsidises, nor salaries any form of worship. Exceptions and adjustments to the ban on funding are defined in the legislation and case-law; they concern in particular chaplaincies, which are paid for by the State.⁷⁹

No religion can impose its prescriptions on the Republic. No religious principle can be invoked for disobeying the law.

⁷⁹ In accordance with Article 2, paragraph 2 of the law of December 9, 1905.

Prohibitions and limits in specific areas.

In the administration, public services, and firms and associations with a public service mission, employees and agents are not allowed to manifest their religious, political or philosophical beliefs by signs, clothes or proselytism. Agents and employees represent in fact the nation as a whole, and must therefore adopt a neutral and impartial attitude, both towards the public and towards those they work with. Infringements are recorded, and can be sanctioned.

In private enterprises with no public service activity, manifestations of religious beliefs may be restricted or prohibited by the company’s regulations, if this is justified by the nature of the work and on condition that the limitation is proportionate to the desired objective.⁸⁰

In the public area, in the sense of a common space (public streets and areas open to the public or used for public services), the Law of October 11, 2010 prohibits concealing one’s face. The law is not based on the *laïcité* principle, but on public security considerations and the minimum demands of life in society.⁸¹

Prohibitions and limits in public services.

Under the law of December 9, 1905, patients can practice their faith in public health institutions as long as they do not impede the functioning of the department, and subject to the requirements of public order, security, health and

⁸⁰ Article L 1121-1 of the *Code du travail*; Article L 1321-2-1 of the *Code du travail*; Directive 78/2000 CE of the *Conseil d’État*, November 27, 2000.

⁸¹ Decision of the *Conseil constitutionnel*, n° 2010-613 DC, October 7, 2010.

hygiene. The freedom to choose one’s doctor does not apply in emergency situations (a doctor cannot be challenged by a patient). Nor can freedom of choice run counter to the doctors’ duty roster or the organisation of medical consultations required for ensuring the continuity of public service. In the case of a patient’s refusal to accept treatment (a blood transfusion, for instance), while the patient’s consent remains the basic principle, entailing therefore his or her right of refusal, the courts accept that for performing an act essential for survival doctors may disregard the rule.⁸²

For mass catering in public institutions, the responsible authority, necessarily neutral, must not take into account religious prescriptions concerning food, (halal or casher), but can offer a choice of menus, with or without meat, for instance. However, in certain closed public institutions (for example prisons, boarding establishments or hospitals) or in the army, in application of Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Law of December 9, 1905,⁸³ the supervisory authority must take into account the fact that certain persons may not have the opportunity to practice their faith elsewhere. In such cases, the *laïcité* principle requires that steps be taken to enable such persons to comply with the food prescriptions of their religion, as long as they do not disturb the functioning of the public service and do not constitute a form of pressure on the members of the group who do not wish to follow suit.⁸⁴

⁸² *Conseil d’État*, October 26, 2001. *Senanayaké*

⁸³ Expenditures incurred by chaplaincies for ensuring that religions can be freely practiced in institutions such as primary and secondary schools, hospices, mental homes and prisons, may however be included in the corresponding budgets.

⁸⁴ *Conseil d’État*, February 10, 2016, n°385929, M.B.

In public sector primary and secondary schools it is forbidden for pupils to manifest ostensibly their religious affiliation by signs or clothes.⁸⁵ In such places, and at an age when the foundations of knowledge are acquired and critical faculties developed, the aim is to protect children from pressures aimed at making them wear such a sign, and to prevent conflicts between those wearing the sign and those who do not.

In public sector higher education establishments, although all faculty members enjoy freedom of expression, all staff members charged with a mission, including individual contractors, whether or not they are in contact with students, are subject to the rules applicable to all officials and public servants and to private sector employees providing a public service. However, such obligations, including that of neutrality, cannot be imposed on outside speakers invited to give a one-off lecture in a public sector establishment. Furthermore, teachers cannot refuse to give a class on the grounds, for instance, that one or several students are wearing religious signs.

Specific behaviours and proselytism in various areas.

Specific behaviours can arise, such as refusing to shake the hand of a person of the opposite sex, to be with such a person in certain collective areas, to work with such a person or to be examined medically by such a person. While there is no rule imposing a given form of politeness, as practices vary according to country, age and social status, forms of behaviour contrary to the equality between

⁸⁵ Law of March 15, 2004, regulating the application of the *laïcité* principle to the wearing of signs or clothes manifesting a religious affiliation in public sector primary and secondary schools.

women and men and to human dignity are unacceptable, and can be considered to be discriminatory.

In public service areas (sports facilities, public swimming pools, etc.), requests for single-sex schedules can be refused, not on the basis of the *laïcité* principle, but on the grounds of gender equality and non-discrimination.⁸⁶

Religious proselytism, consisting in attempting to convince someone to join a religion other than simply by clothes or religious signs,⁸⁷ is forbidden in public services in the name of neutrality.

The same holds true in private firms when, through the means employed or the message conveyed, they disturb the peace or the normal functioning of the enterprise. The same applies when communitarian pressure forces individuals to engage in religious practices, or practices presented as such, which they had not personally expressed the desire to abide by.

2. Freedoms and rights guaranteed by *laïcité*.

Laïcité guarantees freedom of conscience for everyone; this includes the freedom to believe or not to believe, to practice a religion, to be atheist, agnostic or to be an adept of humanist philosophies, to change religion or to cease to have any religion. A distinction must be drawn, however, between the freedom to believe and the freedom to express one's beliefs. There can be no restriction to the freedom of

⁸⁶ However, Article 225-3 of the *Code pénal* lists several exceptions, justified by “the protection of victims of sexual violence; considerations related to respect for privacy and decency, and the promotion of gender equality or the interests of men and women; and the freedom of association and the organisation of sporting activities”.

⁸⁷ *Conseil d'État*, November 27, 1996; n° 170207, 170208.

belief. The freedom of thought from which derives the freedom of conscience includes the freedom to criticise any idea, opinion or belief, subject only to the legal limits of the freedom of expression. The freedom to express one's religious convictions, however, can be limited for the sake of public order, under conditions defined by the law (see the first part of this note). Freedom must however always be the rule, and the limitations the exception, in view of the constitutional principles enshrined in our Republic and France's international commitments, with which such legal restrictions must be compatible.

Laïcité guarantees the neutrality of the State, local authorities and public services, thereby ensuring their impartiality towards all citizens, regardless of their beliefs and convictions.

The Republic neither recognises, nor salaries nor subsidises any form of worship. No religion or conviction can be either privileged or discriminated against. *Laïcité* is based on the separation between the Churches and the State, which means that the Churches cannot intervene in the functioning of the public authorities and that the public authorities do not manage the functioning of religious institutions.

Laïcité is an emancipating factor in two ways. On the one hand, the State is emancipated from any form of religious control. *Laïcité* in France is based on the same principle as democracy: in neither case is the legitimacy of political authority founded on a supernatural basis, but on the sole sovereignty of the people of citizens. And secondly, *laïcité* emancipates religions from any form of State control. It guarantees believers and non-believers and agnostics the same rights, in particular the same right to the freedom to express their convictions.

Laïcité guarantees freedom of religion, but also freedom vis-à-vis religions: no one can be forced to respect religious dogma or prescriptions.

With *laïcité*, the Republic guarantees the exercise of all civil rights, regardless of individual persuasions or beliefs.

Freedoms and rights guaranteed in various areas.

In the public area, in the sense of a common space (such as streets, public gardens, beaches, etc.), a person is free to wear religious signs, like any other sign expressing a person's convictions. For reasons of public security and in accordance with the minimum demands of life in society, it is however forbidden to conceal one's face.

It is important to distinguish clearly between what constitutes an objective disturbance of the peace, which sets a legal limit to religious practices, and a subjective perception which does not in itself warrant a limitation of the “fundamental freedoms of movement, of conscience and personal freedom.”⁸⁸ Dress codes, forms of physical appearance or behaviour, presented or perceived as expressions of religious affiliation, are liable to provoke reactions of hostility or suspicion.⁸⁹ Prohibition of all signs

⁸⁸ *Conseil d'État* Order 402742, 402777, August 26, 2016: *Ligue des droits de l'homme et autres - association de défense des droits de l'homme collectif contre l'islamophobie en France*.

⁸⁹ Such forms of dress, of physical appearance or behaviour, may be presented as signs of a common affiliation, but also of marks of respect or modesty. Such signs concern both men and women, but reservations mainly target women's clothes. Reservations or expressions of hostility mainly spring from the feeling that such manifestations are a symbolic aggression on the part of a religion seen as practising proselytism in the collective space. In the case of women's clothes, such signs are seen as an infringement of women's

reflecting a person's religious or other convictions in public areas (in the sense of the common space) would be an attack on the fundamental freedom to express one's convictions (in the realm of religion, politics, trade unions, philosophy). Under the French Rule of Law, characterised by the principle of freedom, one does not forbid all that one disapproves of.

In a more general sense, in all areas, and with the exception of agents or employees carrying out a public service mission, people can dress as they wish, as long as they avoid forms of exhibition forbidden by law and abide by the rules concerning professional wear and the restrictions that may be imposed by requirements of public order, decency or hygiene, and by those justified by the nature of the task, and on condition that the limitation is proportional to the aim pursued.

Freedoms and rights guaranteed in boarding establishments, hospitals, armed forces, penitentiary structures and in the school system.

The application of the *laïcité* principle must take into account the fact that certain persons are unable to practise their religion elsewhere, if they find themselves in boarding establishments, hospitals, the armed forces or in a penitentiary structure. That is why the Law of December 9, 1905 specifies that chaplaincies, paid for by the State, should be set up in such places.

The Republic guarantees that public education be governed by the *laïcité* principle.

freedom, of their right to equality, even of their dignity, in violation of the principle of equality between men and women.

In public higher education institutions, which are areas of debate and freedom of expression, the students, who have freely chosen their course of study, are free to manifest their convictions, within the limits of the proper functioning of the establishment.⁹⁰ However, students' dress should be adapted to the requirements in terms of hygiene or security of certain activities or courses (physical or sporting activities, practical work in chemistry, manipulation of dangerous instruments, etc.) During examinations, in order to prevent fraud, students may be asked not to conceal their ears, so that the absence of communication devices can be checked. Furthermore, contestation of lectures in the form of threats, pressure or attempts to challenge the lecturer, or to exclude some of the students, can lead to disciplinary action, in addition to possible legal sanctions. Students of the teacher training colleges (*Écoles supérieures du professorat et de l'éducation* - ESPE), who have passed the competitive examination for entering the teaching profession, are ipso facto trainee civil servants, and thereby subject to the obligation of neutrality - whether they be already teaching or still students. Lastly, while the departments organising examinations are invited to avoid, as far as possible, sessions on religious feast days, if it proves materially impossible to do so that does not constitute a violation of the religious freedom of the candidates.

⁹⁰ See the report of the Stasi Commission, 2003: "The situation of the Universities, although they belong to the public education system, is very different from that of the schools. University students are adults. Universities must be open to the world. There can therefore be no question of preventing students from expressing their religious, political or philosophical convictions. On the other hand, such manifestations must not lead to transgressing the institution's rules. It is not admissible for faculty members to be challenged owing to their sex or supposed religion, nor for teaching to be obstructed on principle."

Religious expression in the public area and relations with the churches.

Ceremonies, processions or other external collective manifestations of worship are possible as long as they do not disturb the peace. Mayors can however impose a route or a location for such religious demonstrations, for reasons of security or road traffic.

Religions are free, like any other social group, to express themselves on matters of society, ethics, politics or social affairs, as long as they do not preach discrimination, hatred or violence, or civil disobedience.

Any citizen or organisation can express, by lawful means, hostility towards a draft bill, or even a law duly voted, on the grounds that they consider the text to be contrary to their convictions. However, once the bill becomes law they are bound to obey it and refrain from hindering its application. No one is however obliged to make use personally of a freedom granted by law. Expression of one's convictions cannot go so far as to question, in the name of principles considered to be “of a higher order”, the legitimacy of decisions taken by democratic bodies.

While the *laïcité* principle distinguishes between the Churches and the Republic, it does not prevent the public authorities from consulting representatives of the religions and the main philosophical schools of thought.

EXCURSUS: ON PROPHECY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

It should be understood by the reader that phenomenological philosophers define their own problematic. That is why phenomenological philosophers need to be judiciously conscious of the phenomena selected for interpretation based on personal experience. In this excursus, then, I offer a critical commentary on my reading of Old and New Testament prophecy and relate it to phenomenological philosophy. Contrasted with the traditional ecclesiastical interpretation of prophecy, my philosophical interpretation may differ somewhat from the inherited understanding. Although this excursus amounts to a significant digression from the chapters above, I hope that it will act as an adequate illustration of phenomenological interpretation. Although the prophetic texts themselves are the focus of study, the new meanings that the phenomenological philosophers disclose and assign to the text that have arisen from critical contemplation is a significant outcome for themselves as well as the believing community.

All prophecy, Hebrew or otherwise, shares the characteristic of claiming to be *inspired*. From the earliest times prophets were positively possessed or summoned by an external agency. However, sometimes less positively when recognized as acting collectively.⁹¹ In

⁹¹ The 'Introduction to the Prophets' in the *Jerusalem Bible* (Doubleday & Co., 1966:1115) states that "this was particularly true of Israel's neighbours: texts from the second millennium B. C. tell of prophetic activity at Mari on the Euphrates and at Byblos in Phoenicia. More detailed evidence comes from the Bible itself which speaks of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal summoned by Jezebel, a native of Tyre, and discomfited by Elijah on Mt Carmel, (1 K 18:19-40); and the Bible goes on to speak of the four hundred prophets consulted by

many cases inspiration came to the prophets under the influence of music that also affected their audience. Such performances were often very extravagant and the psychological states of the prophets were sometimes considered abnormal. These inspired prophets were called *Nabi*, meaning “he who is called or he who proclaims,” which is the meaning I accept here. The utterances of these *Nabi* are subject to a reassigned meaning in light of contemporary experience according to phenomenological philosophers who contemplate them. The reassigned meaning is sometimes not necessarily applicable to the era in which the original meaning was proclaimed. Meanings that were understood then and meanings as they are understood now frequently disclose two differing perspectives.

Prophecy in Israel is identified by a number of characteristics that are culturally specific, but nevertheless these characteristics are capable of carrying a prophetic meaning beyond their originating culture. Their message, then, is applicable to their own day and applicable to later generations. Phenomenological philosophers tend to focus on observable phenomena from a more comprehensive perspective than traditional Hellenistic philosophers. This comprehensive understanding applies to the prophet as a person and, as well as to the message proclaimed by the prophet. Prophets are the bearers and interpreters of the word of God and cannot not prophesy. However, as bearers of the word of God, “this proposition does not mean that there were no true prophets outside the OT and NT,” as

Ahab (1 K 22:5-12). Like the former, these were a group of wild ecstasies, though they claimed to speak in the name of Yahweh. The claim was false, but evidently contemporary Yahwism recognized that such an institution was not in itself illegitimate.”

Karl Rahner has observed.⁹² But the words of the prophets are not the sole phenomena for interpretation. Their behaviour is also a phenomenon for contemplation. Having received a divine call, the prophet's subsequent unconventional personality can act as a sign of authenticity for others.

Divine inspiration comes to them in various ways; i.e., by visions, by hearing, by internal motivation, sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes through ordinary circumstances. Their message has also been conveyed to contemporary generations in various ways, i.e., by brief literary fragments or aphorisms, by prose narrative, by parables, by exhortation, by sermon, by proverb, by psalms, by love songs, etc. This variety of conveyance is due to the individual temperament and talents of each prophet. What is common to all these prophetic ways, however, is that the prophet is a mouthpiece, that is, his words are his own, yet not his own. The source of the prophet's words, interpreted from a classical perspective, is mysterious and originates from God. However, phenomenological philosophers may conceive the origin of the prophet's words differently, that is, *as if* their source were mysterious and originating from God. The source is, however, also in the prophet's own consciousness of reality as a social fact. (Recall that reality is anything with which humans have a relationship.) Prophets rarely address a single person through their messages. Their messages are intended for the entire Hebrew nation, or in some cases, all nations. The exception to all-nation prophecies is the king himself, when considered as a prophet, since he bears responsibility solely for the Hebrew nation. In an interesting, but related,

⁹² s. v. 'Prophetism' in *The Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Burns & Oates, 1975:1287 (ed. Karl Rahner).

cultural twist, the prophet Zechariah in Chapter 3 proclaims his words of blessing to the high priest Joshua.

The prophets' messages relate to both the present and the future. The prophets' messages are also instructive when historical events are understood phenomenologically as history that accounts for how we arrived at our present evolutionary stage. Sometimes messages are fulfilled in the prophet's own time. At other times a prophet's message looks forward to the final triumph of God which will be fulfilled in messianic times. Often grave threat and divine consolation are antecedent conditions to the messianic prophecies. The prophets of Israel speak of punishment and pardon when speaking God's words. However, interpreted phenomenologically, the words of the messianic prophets may speak of the universal condition of imperfect humanity in terms of a projection onto an historical schema of evolutionary development. This perspective is evident through the collections of prophetic oracles against the non-Hebrew nations. Although sent to the people of Israel, the prophet's message at times transcends the Hebrew nation (Isaiah 13, Jeremiah 46, Ezekiel 25) and discloses a meaning for other nations and peoples.

There are spurious prophets within the Biblical record who are not distinguished by their utterances or behaviour from true prophets. Having succeeded in duping the people, it is only afterwards that the genuine prophets are able to denounce them, as well as their message. In later prophetic history, two criteria are advanced by genuine prophets in denouncing false prophets. First, fulfillment of the prophecy itself, and secondly, the prophetic utterances must be in accord with the revealed doctrine on Mount Sinai. At times, the prophets' message, notably Jeremiah, involved Israelite priests. But this recognition is not intended to imply any official part in temple worship on the

part of the prophets. In other words, prophets are not priests. In its evolution the prophetic function, in fact, must be deduced from a variety of unique personalities, social facts, texts and artifacts all interpreted phenomenologically. From a combination of these factors the phenomenologist recognizes that the prophet is one who has had an immediate experience of God; is one to whom the holiness and will of God have been revealed; is one who contemplates the present and the future through the eyes of God, as it were; and is one sent to remind the faithful of their duty to God and bring them back to obedience and love when they have fallen away. In short, through phenomenological interpretation, prophets are "made to appear," or are disclosed as agents of God.

Thus, to my mind, prophecy is a philosophical movement, which I interpret phenomenologically, initially within the sacred history of the Hebrew people. Moses, as a Hebrew *Nabi*, is the most distinguished representative of Hebrew philosophy in its pristine state for Moses spoke with God face to face, as it were, and conveyed God's law to the chosen people. The prophets play an important role, traditionally interpreted theologically, in the development of the sacred history of Israel. In addition, the Mosaic Law provides a record of experience for a phenomenological philosophical interpretation. It is through the formation of the scriptural canon that information about the prophets and their message is preserved. It is this collection of prophetic texts that I contemplate as an existential phenomenon from a philosophical perspective, not as disclosing secular history, but as initially disclosing sacred history. In accordance with keeping the nation faithful to the Mosaic doctrine, prophets are conceived as chosen by God to reveal the *mind of God*, or, when conceived as philosophers they make the *wisdom of God* appear within the doctrinal history of the people of Israel, i.e., monotheism, morality

and messianism. The intended purpose of prophet and philosopher is virtually identical. The wisdom of God is, in fact, a particular evaluation of the mind of God by phenomenological philosophers. An uncontestable message of the prophet/philosopher was that there was no place for other gods next to the God of revelation on Mount Sinai. When the legacy of Hebraic monotheism was threatened the prophet/philosopher demonstrated the impotence of false gods and the uselessness of idols. From the moral perspective of these individuals, God is often pure holiness, whereas humanity is often unclean. Such uncleanness is national and collective, and will be punished accordingly, but on occasion individual punishment is appropriate (Ezekiel 18:4 & 33:10-20). Messianism is the notion that God does not ultimately want the people of Israel to perish, hence a saviour is always on the horizon of Israel's sacred history. After any disaster in Israel there is always a remnant that survives as a promising shoot for the future of the nation. These phenomena, as a remnant of the chosen people continues to be experienced by the devout today. And when subject to a phenomenological interpretation possibly discloses multiple messages of understanding.

Even though the canonical books bear the prophets' names it is evident that the majority of prophets were not writers in any sense that required the skills of editorial writing. They were speakers and preachers and the more significant of them had their message recorded as a written text through the efforts of various disciples acting as scribes. The prophetic books appear to phenomenologists as forming two genres of literature, i.e., as a collection of prophetic sayings, or oracles, or poetry, and as narratives told in the 1st or 3rd person. These collections had been collected together and "became the subject of reading and meditation and helped to keep alive for new generations the

spirit of the prophets who had gone before.”⁹³ As an intellectual activity scripture reading and meditation are nothing less than a phenomenological contemplation on the thoughts of the prophets in order to adapt the content of their books to the spiritual needs of a new *cultural* generation. And (in some cases) to improve upon the accuracy of interpretation and understanding of the texts by the phenomenologist. That is to say that phenomenological philosophers as interpretive “heirs to the prophets” can be considered as preserving and developing the existential treasure received from their masters, as it were.⁹⁴

“How does interpreting the legacy of the individual prophets phenomenologically contribute anything to the preservation and developing of Hebrew prophecy within Christian culture?” asks the inquiring philosopher. Hebraic sacred history provides a clue to the answer. Within his era of political intrigue and military conquests, Isaiah’s prophecies were appropriate to the times. Thus, his reputation as a national figure for Israel is worth contemplating from a phenomenological perspective for a possible answer to the question. Phenomenological contemplation reveals that Isaiah encouraged the people to put their trust in God, not in various military alliances with the non-Hebrew nations. God is holy, mighty, and one, as well as king in Isaiah’s prophecies. The people are sinful and God demands appropriate reparation. These same phenomena are reflected in the fashioning of Christian culture today. In short, various phenomena in contemporary

⁹³ ‘Introduction to the Prophets’ in the *Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co (1966:1123).

⁹⁴ In “preserving and developing” the scriptures, I mean that phenomenologists do not ignore the religious experience of the past recorded in the texts, but that they consciously determine the future applicability of the text’s message within the culture currently being experienced.

culture reflect the dominant theme of the first part of the book of Isaiah. A greater degree of preservation of the past than development for the future is evident to the minds of many phenomenologists. The second part of the book (no longer believed to be written by him) discloses a shift in the cultural matrix. Jerusalem has fallen, the nation is in exile, and Cyrus the Persian king is about to enter upon the scene and subsequently free the Hebrew nation from captivity in Babylon. In this section of Isaiah, all the related prophecies offer divine consolations, which are more sophisticated in cultural expression than neighbouring nations. Thus, monotheism is able to render false gods as insignificant. False gods being insignificant from a phenomenological perspective, contemporary philosophers recognize that a concept of monotheistic "religious universalism" is beginning to appear in Hebrew prophecy. As a phenomenon this suggests that a degree of existential theological advancement on behalf of prophet/philosopher is also occurring. Further, a critical reading of Israel's sacred history shows this observation of universalism, first noted in prophetic activity, is also evident within the existential culture of the Hebrew nation in its relations with other nations. That is, Israel will show the other nations how to behave (cf Isaiah 49:6).

In Jeremiah's time war and intrigue also dominated the Hebrew nation's life. Jerusalem was captured and the temple destroyed and there were further deportations. Jeremiah was seen by the pro-militarists of the nation as a negative and defeatist prophet and, in fact, he was rejected by them. However, Jeremiah saw that the hope of the nation resided with the exiles. Ironically, his peaceful personality perpetually set him at odds with the nation, kings, priests and false prophets. In short, to their way of thinking he was a man of strife and of dissention for all the land (Jeremiah 15:10). Phenomenologically, the prophet

being at odds with the status quo, appears to be countercultural. In a follow-up question for the present moment, one asks: Do countercultural prophet/philosophers phenomenologically appear in the matrix of a Christian culture? If so, where might they be found? ⁹⁵ Judging from his personality Jeremiah foreshadowed an evangelical-style relationship with God. He practiced an inward and heartfelt religion characteristic of genuine evangelical Christians. He re-thought the harshness of traditional prophetic teaching and re-conceived "The Law" as an inward force with love as a mark of the true religion. For the phenomenological philosopher the lack of order in the book in its present form does not present any particular difficulty with the interpretation of its contents. ⁹⁶ It is not the book itself that is primarily of interest to the phenomenological philosopher. The prophet's insights and their authenticity and durability as recorded and as presented to the consciousness of the phenomenologist are of primary interest.

Ezekiel, with the unusual status of being a priest, as well as a prophet, was primarily interested in the temple as a focal point for his prophecies. Whether it be the temple of the day defiled by impure rites, or the temple of the future reflecting the glory of God who has returned to the temple sanctuary, was his focus. A priestly culture is clearly evident in his prophesies which discloses the theological development of a sophisticated prophet/philosopher beyond

⁹⁵ Readers of a certain age and devotees of a certain musical tradition should readily recall Paul Simon's lyrics: "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls and whispered in the sound of silence."

⁹⁶ "The book as we have it now is in a state of disorder, the outcome of a protracted compilation, the stages of which are very hard to sort out." 'Introduction to the Prophets' in the *Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co (1966:1127).

the simple religiosity of his prophetic predecessors. Priestly precision had fine-tuned the doctrinal understanding introduced through temple worship. Ezekiel's prophecies, understood phenomenologically, appear to have been raised to an advanced spiritual level suggesting the need for assistance in their interpretation via priestly intervention.

The Book of Daniel, through the narration of the various trials of Daniel and his companions and their subsequent escape, was meant to show that the pagans, who persecuted these favoured persons of God, should now give glory to God for having saved Daniel and company from disaster. The narratives are set in Babylon during the captivity of the Israelites and are intended to preserve the hope that the kingdom of God will ultimately be established. "God will bring [the kingdom] to fulfilment after a lapse of time fixed by him, but long enough to embrace the whole human history. The various stages of the world's history become stages in the operation of God's eternal purpose, so that these world-stages, past, present and future, themselves become prophetic of a further future since all are contemplated through the eyes of God 'who controls times and seasons,'" reads the Introduction to the book.⁹⁷ As an evolutionary phenomenon, the changing history of the Hebrew nation discloses the applicability of Hebrew prophecy to nations outside Israel.

The vocation of a prophet need not be for life, nor have any long-term association with the utterances of other prophet/philosophers. Amos is a case in point. He did not belong to any confraternity of prophets. His messages were confined to the schismatic shrine at Bethel in the northern Kingdom of Israel. And, once his task was completed, he

⁹⁷ 'Introduction to the Prophets' in the *Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday & Co (1966:1133).

left Israel and returned to shepherding within Judah, the Southern Kingdom. His oracles were not innovative but reminiscent of the commands given at Sinai in the context of social justice where the rich were admonished to cease exploiting the poor. Phenomenologists will recognize the obvious parallels of Amos' criticisms of exploitation, even though they were directed to the northern shrine, within contemporary historical events regardless of their cultural matrix.

Hosea's utterances are recognized as being of a similar nature. Being a contemporary of Amos he reveals the worship at Bethel as an idolatrous activity for much the same reasons as Amos. Similarly, Micah and Zephaniah both condemn social injustice and proclaim that God will punish the rich who act as corrupt overlords towards the poor. Collectively, these ancient prophets functioned as prophet/philosophers and "made appear" as phenomena the injustices in the societies and cultures of their times. As an exception within the prophetic tradition of Israel, the "violent nationalism" of Nahum lacks any indication of a loving relationship towards the non-Hebrew nations. All nations who oppose God's holy purposes, including Israel, will be punished. And Nahum's prophetic lesson, which also transcends Israel, is disclosed through the destruction of Nineveh as a phenomenon for all nations to behold. However, Habakkuk, while following many of the same themes as his predecessors, introduces a new aspect to prophecy from a phenomenological perspective. He demands from God, as it were, an account of the ordering of the world by questioning the historical fact that God has chosen the Chaldeans to punish the Kingdom of Judah. Judah may be bad, but why should God choose the Chaldeans, who are worse than the Judeans, to punish those less bad, asks Habakkuk. It is highly likely that a phenomenological philosopher will recognize this

prophetic query expressed within the contemporary experience of the faithful as: "why me, Lord? I'm not that bad."

Haggai is the last post-exilic prophet who prophesied in the Era of Restoration according to contemporary historians. Prior to the Era of Restoration, the prophets of the exile lived in the Era of Punishment, and during the Exile it was the Time of Consolation, and now it is the post-exilic Era of Restoration. For the Hebrew people the Era of Restoration meant the establishment of a new Temple that would outshine that previous one and reflect God's glory and majesty to an even greater degree according to Haggai. Thus, Christian interpreters, from a phenomenological perspective, assign messianic hope to the Era of Restoration as understood from Haggai's prophesies. But, of course, in their case the "temple" is not made of bricks and mortar but of the Body of the Christ, being the People of the New Covenant. Zechariah is also preoccupied, in the first part of his book, with the rebuilding of the Temple along with improving the moral conduct of the people. Thus, the second part of his book is less specific. It recalls the social justice issues of previous prophets. Malachi also treats of the themes of social justice and moral behaviour of Israel. But in a cultural context, not itself dated, yet intended to transcend time as culturally and chronologically calculated. Not the events of a historical narrative but the supra-historical and universal phenomenal behaviour of the people is the book's moral focus. Further, the literary form is reminiscent of the thesis-antithesis-thesis pattern disclosed through phenomenological philosophy. That is to say, for every "good" there arises a "bad, which when conquered by the "good," gives rise to a "bad." The process continues, *ad infinitum*, or as long as there is the phenomenon of human consciousness.

Obadiah's prophecy consists of literary compositions crafted by scholars. There is no academic consensus on its composition. However, phenomenologically interpreted, it is generally maintained that the prophecies in the book operate on two perceptions of consciousness: one is historical time, the other is duration. The first is immediate and the second is remote, that is to say, punishment in the present, and glory later. It is not clear in Obadiah's prophecy when the "later" glory replaces the "present" punishment. In the prophet Joel's case his contribution to the prophetic movement is the consolation of the phenomenal outpouring of God's spirit on all God's people in a future messianic age that will have transcended Israel's past history. Thus, Christians find the fulfillment of Joel's prophecies in the phenomenal appearance of the person of the Christ.

The final prophet I consider from a phenomenological perspective is Jonah. His book is the narrative of a reluctant prophet whose mission turns out to be successful. The prophetic narratives recorded there have no relation to the historical development of the culture of Israel. The narratives are a didactic work that represents a high point of Old Testament doctrinal interpretation. The story teller cautions against narrow interpretations of the prophetic utterances in favour of a broad catholicity which makes them open to universal phenomenological interpretation regardless of their cultural context. The same may be said of all the prophet/philosophers I have considered whose ultimate focus is on the inclusive theme of the salvation of the people of God. By way of summation, I set out the methodologies, in chart form, of the philosopher and prophet which I hold to be similar in intent. The chart is a simplified and condensed schema of the main points arising from the general discussion above.

A CHRISTIAN PHENOMENOLOGICAL CULTURE
As a “New to You” Matrix

Philosophy	Prophecy
The philosopher’s function is to be the bearer and interpreter of knowledge.	The prophet’s function is to be the bearer and interpreter of the word of God.
The philosopher responds to personal wonder about life as the “love of wisdom.”	The prophet responds to an irresistible call of another as divine experience.
Philosophers discuss “signs” of knowledge from their personal experience.	Prophets are themselves, as personalities, “signs” of the divine will.
Human knowledge is given expression through the individual temperament and natural talents of the philosopher.	The divine message is given expression through the individual temperament and natural talents of the prophet.
The philosopher’s insight is contingent upon his or her era, and upon our time, and will be in the future.	The prophet’s message relates to his or her own era, and to our present and future experience.
The philosopher’s words are solely his or her own words shared with a community of human beings.	The prophet’s words are personally his or her own, and at the same time God’s word, shared with the world.
Philosophers discuss or dispute among themselves, usually respectfully.	Genuine prophets denounce those prophets held to be frauds. No discussion.
Philosophers arise from the experience of life.	Prophets are sent to the Hebrews within the world.

EXAMINERS' REPORT

European-American University

Date: 1 July 2010

Reference: ASOI/07/2010

Student: Allan Maurice Savage

Degree: Doctor of Letters

The candidate presented a portfolio of publications for assessment accompanied by a critical commentary in line for the regulations for the degree entitled "Interdisciplinary Insights Applied within a Theological Context". The portfolio was extremely wide-ranging and included work principally in the area of theology and secondarily in the areas of philosophy and psychology.

In addition to previous degree awards and ministerial appointments, the portfolio contained two testimonials from the Bishop of Algoma attesting to his appreciation and high regard for the candidate's work in ministry.

The evidence of achievement in line with the Regulations for the granting of the degree of Doctor of Letters by published work was amply displayed. The high level and scope of the work undertaken was clearly evidenced and offered a contribution to scholarship that was both original and unusually broadly-based. It was clear that the candidate had thoroughly absorbed the corpus of existing thought in his chosen areas, and had shown himself to be both a cogent expositor of the scholarship of others and an original thinker in his own right.

The candidate supplied a detailed exegesis in his critical commentary that considered each submitted work in turn. The examiners greatly appreciated the role of this approach in clarifying the intentions, methodology and context of the works concerned. The candidate also included a list of the libraries which have acquired at least one of his books. He concludes that "their acceptance tells me they determined that my books "have something to say" of academic value to the university community and perhaps to the civic community at large." The

examiners endorse this conclusion and commend the work involved accordingly.

It is invidious and necessarily subjective to single out examples of particular work in a submission that was uniformly impressive, but the three books “A Phenomenological Understanding of Certain Liturgical Texts: The Anglican Collects for Advent and the Roman Catholic Collects for Lent”, “Faith, Hope and Charity as Character Traits in Adler’s Individual Psychology with Related Essays in Spirituality and Phenomenology” and “The Ecology: A “New to You” View (An Orthodox Theological Ecology)” were held by the examiners to be of particular merit.

The examiners felt in summary that the submission was of an exemplary quality and reflected exceptional achievement over a sustained period of time. The award of a higher doctorate does not permit the conferral of marks of distinction, but in this case it was felt that the submission was such as to have merited this accolade were it to have been available.

Andrew Linley, D.D. (Convenor)
Vice-President and Director of Administrative Affairs
Percy Dearmer Professor of Liturgical Studies

John Kersey, Hon.LL.D., Hon.D.Mus., D.D., Ed.D., Ph.D.
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